CLEMENS AND THE COP P. 16

# Sports Illustrated

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NBA MIDSEASON REPORT
Shootout in the West

THE NEW OFFENSE
That's Changing Basketball
BY GRANT WAHL



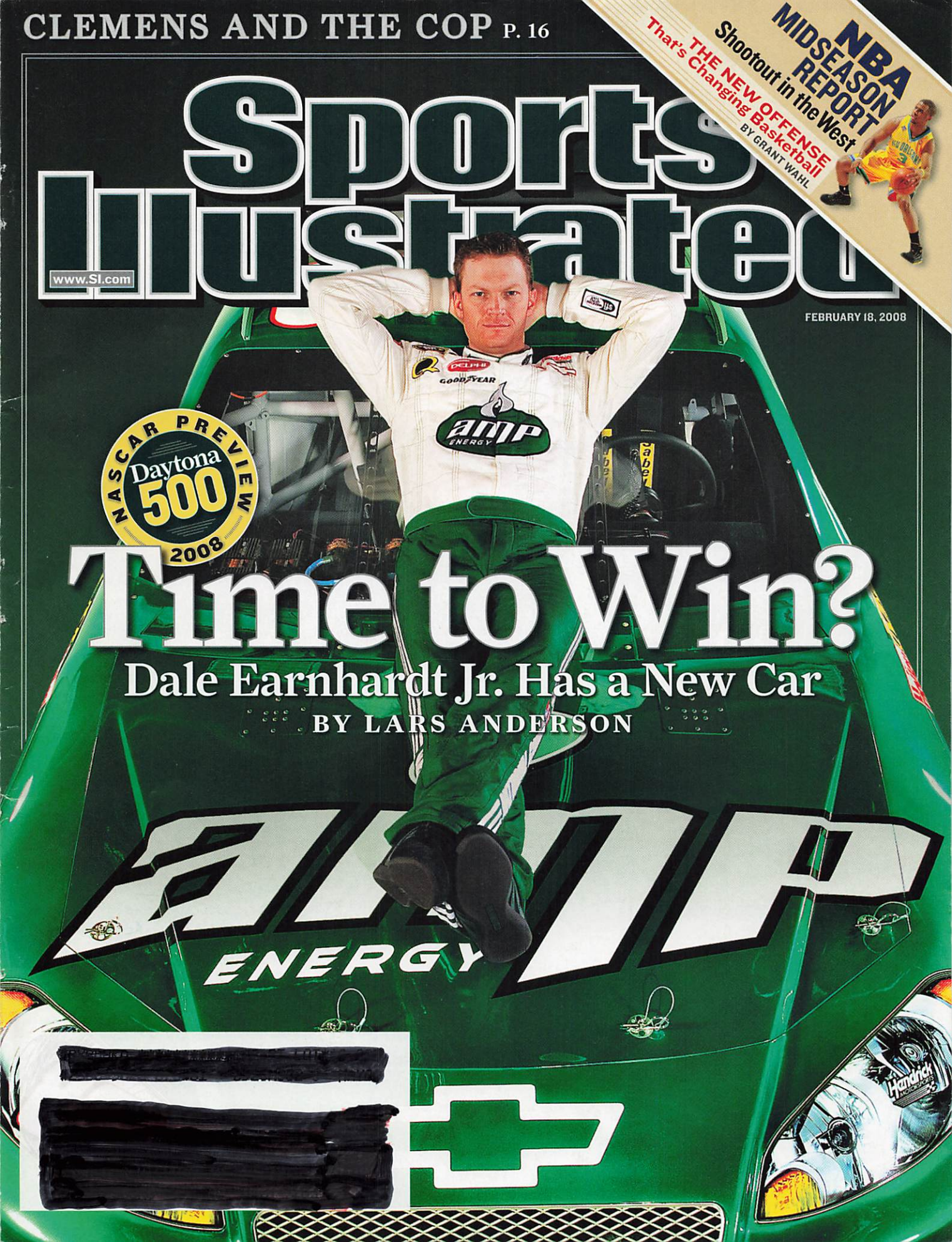
FEBRUARY 18, 2008

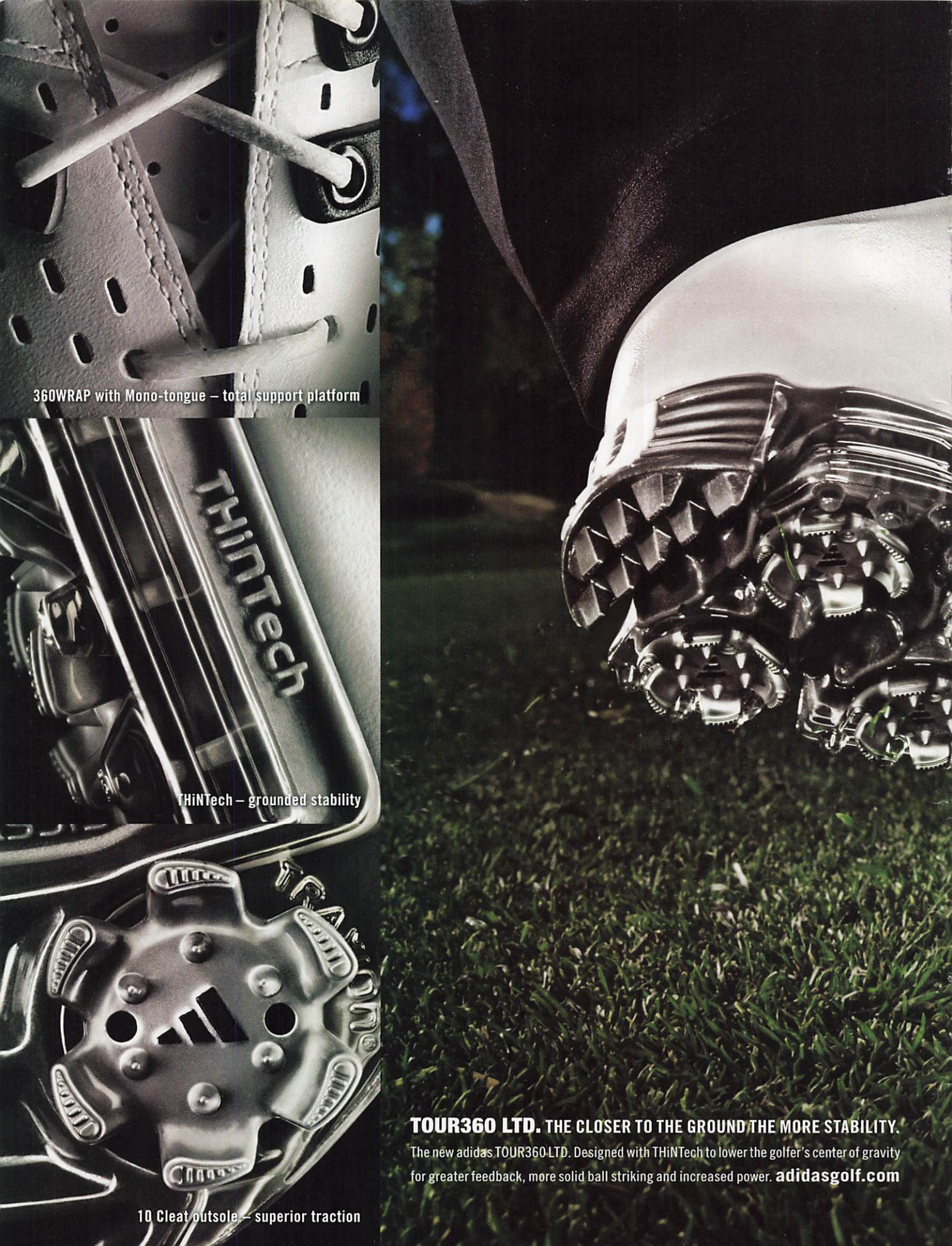
NASCAR PREVIEW
Daytona 500
2008

## Time to Win?

### Dale Earnhardt Jr. Has a New Car

BY LARS ANDERSON

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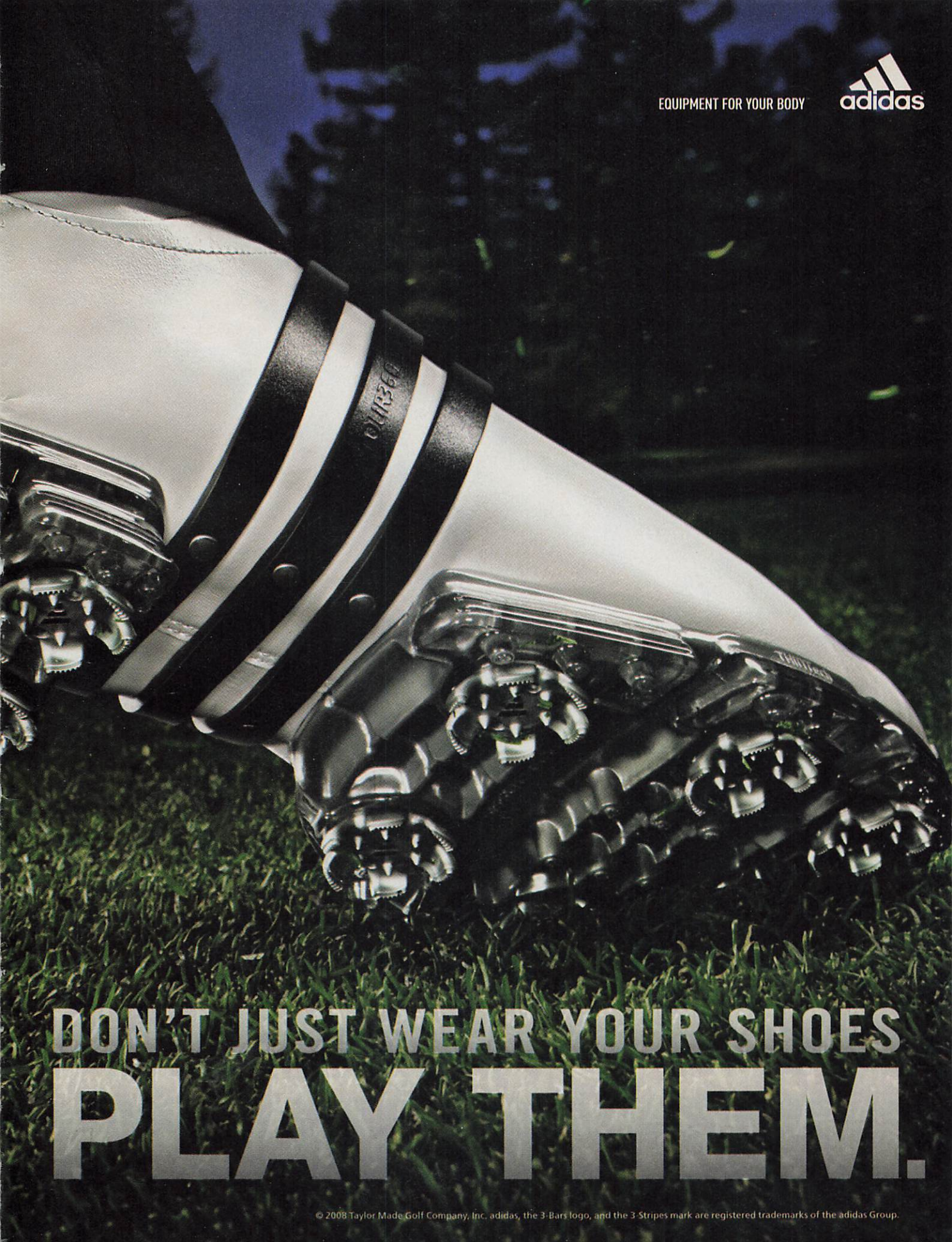


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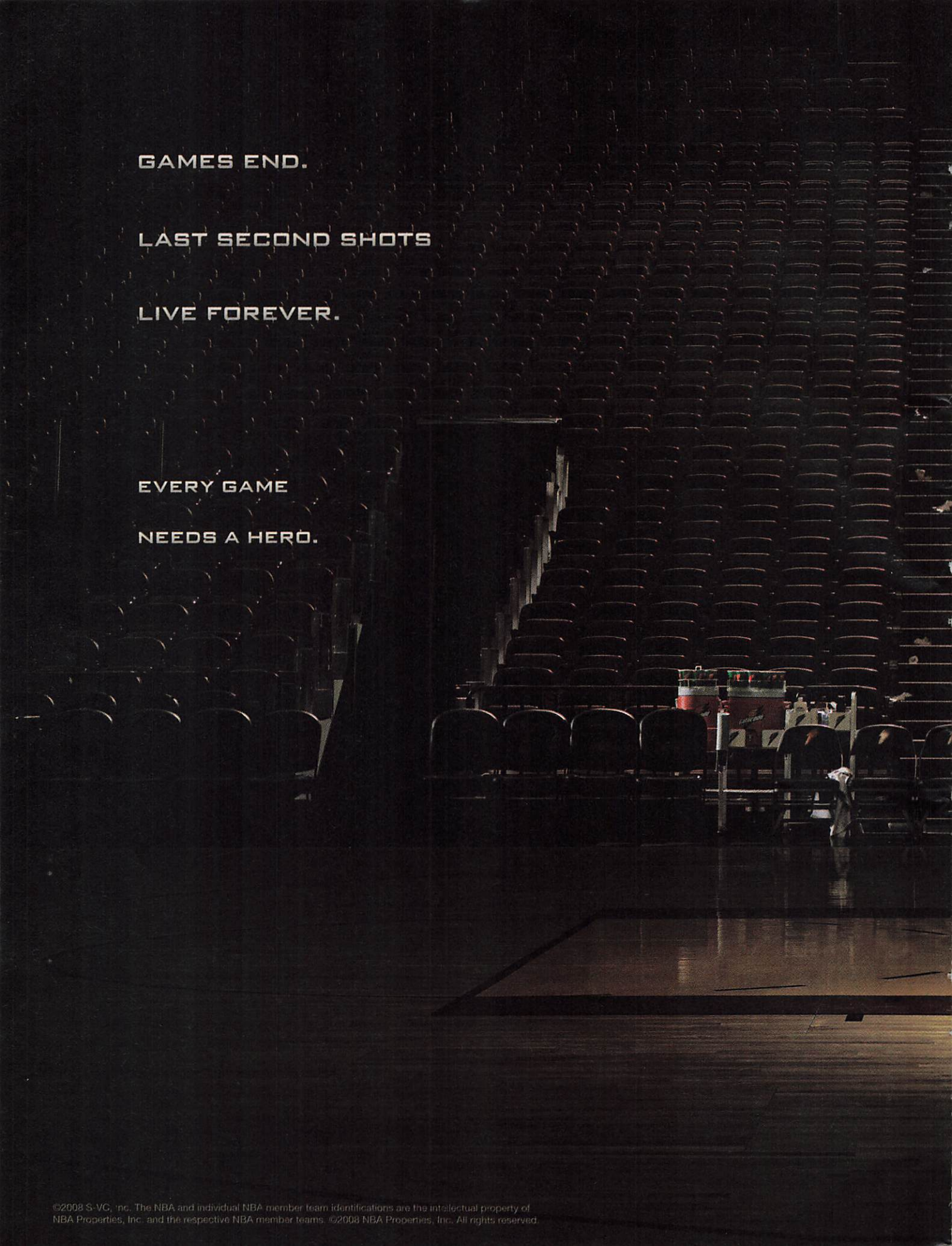


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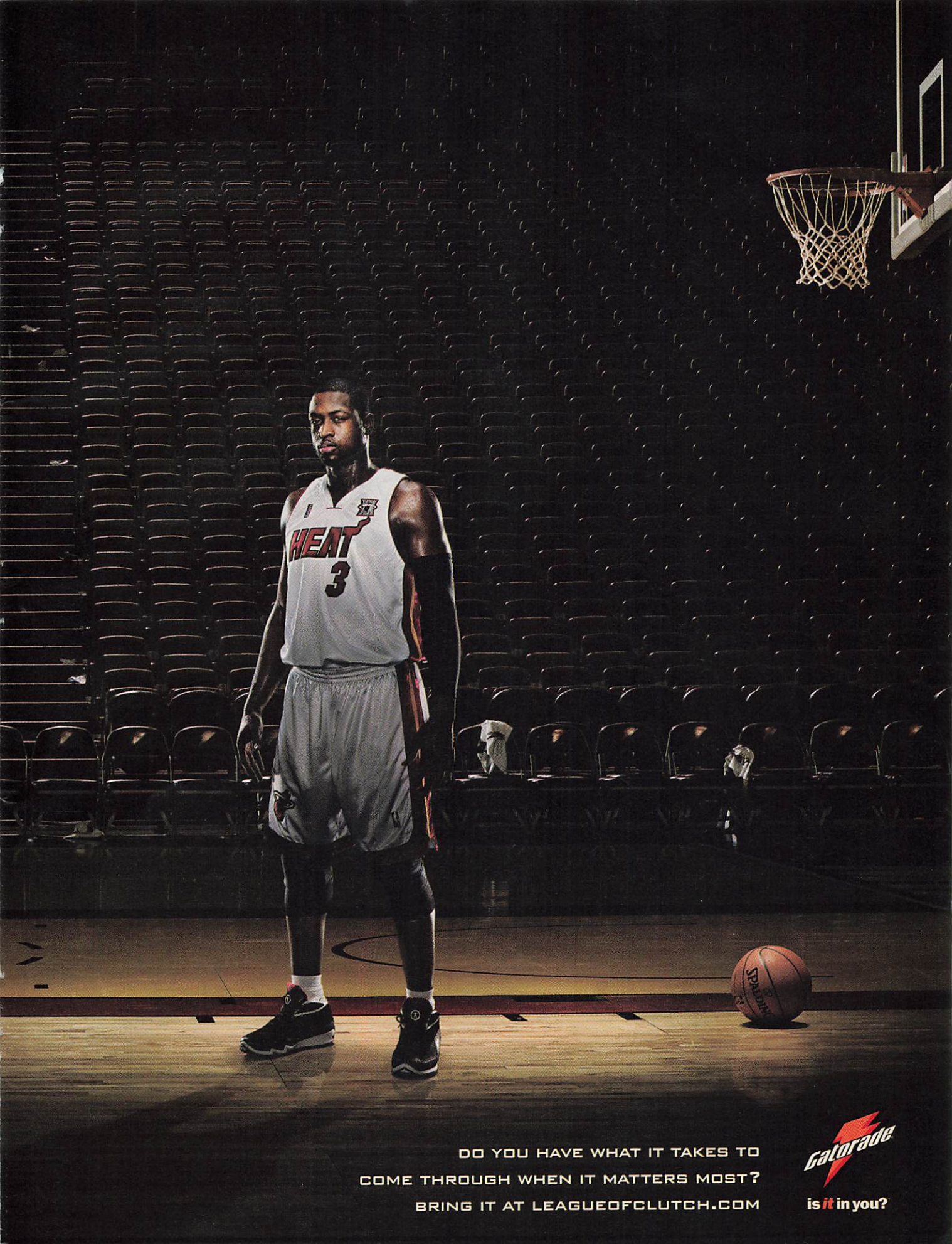


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# Lineup

FEBRUARY 18, 2008
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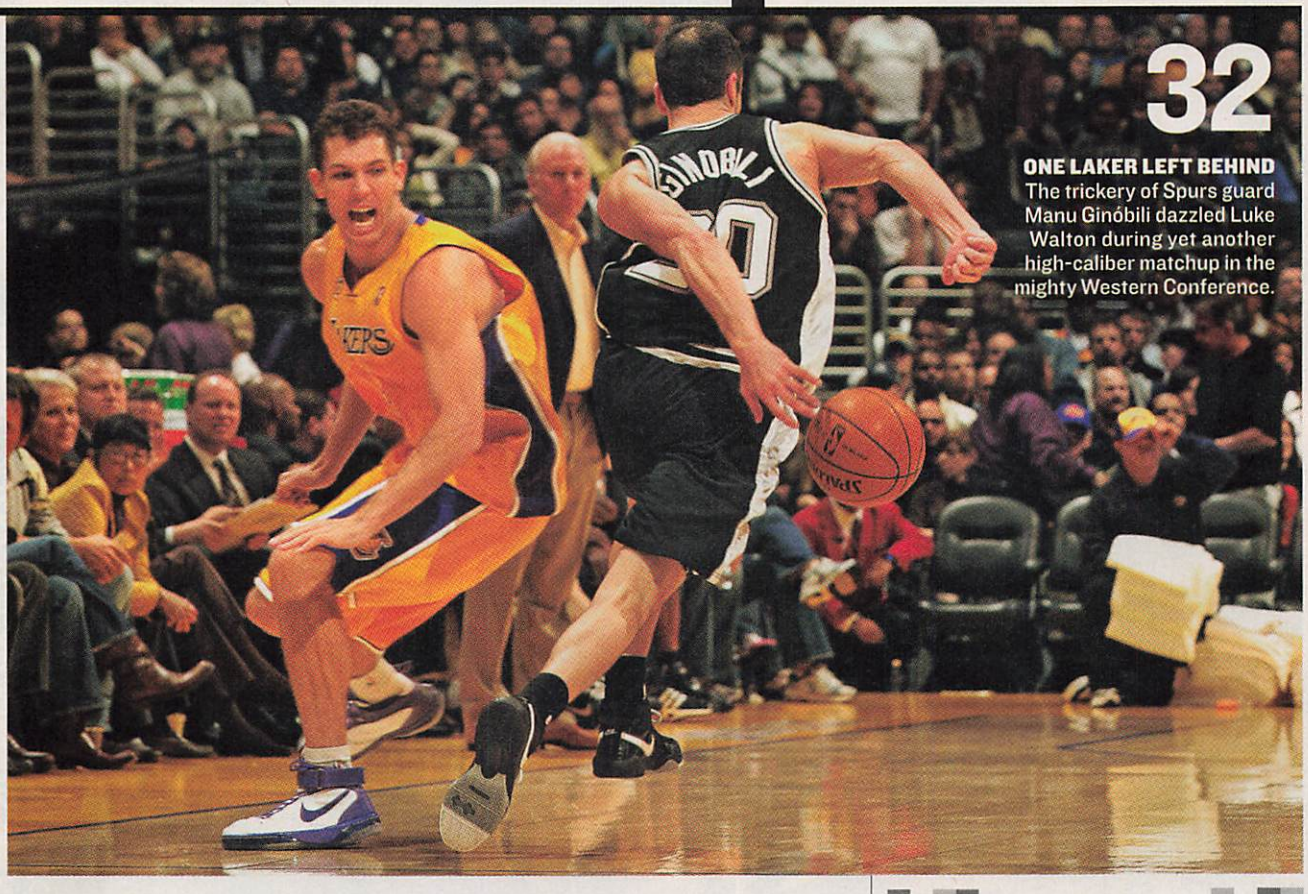

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**ONE LAKER LEFT BEHIND**
The trickery of Spurs guard Manu Ginóbili dazzled Luke Walton during yet another high-caliber matchup in the mighty Western Conference.

JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (NBA); MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/IDEUCES PHOTOGRAPHY (EARNHARDT)

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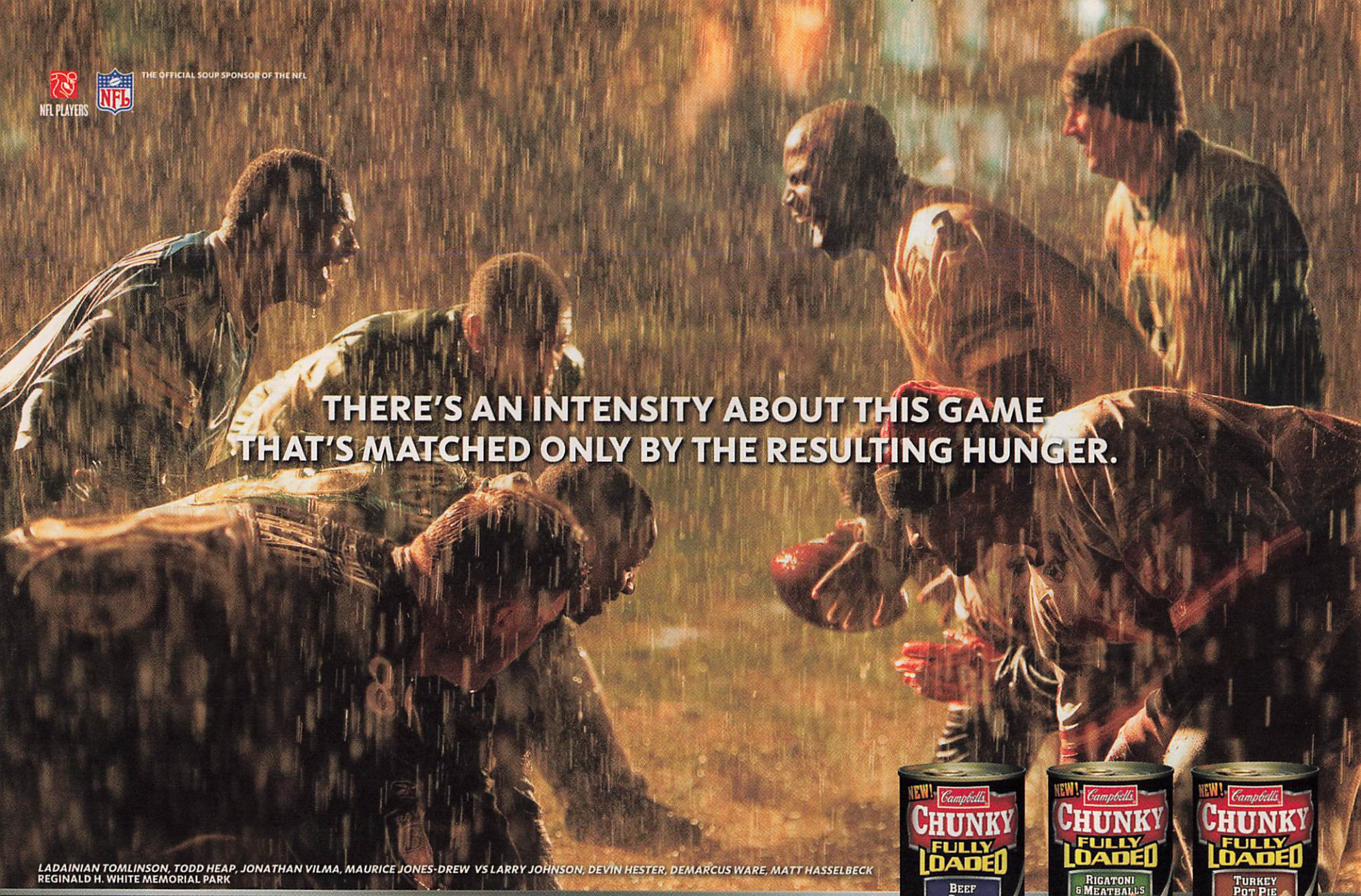
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# Lineup

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## SI Extra

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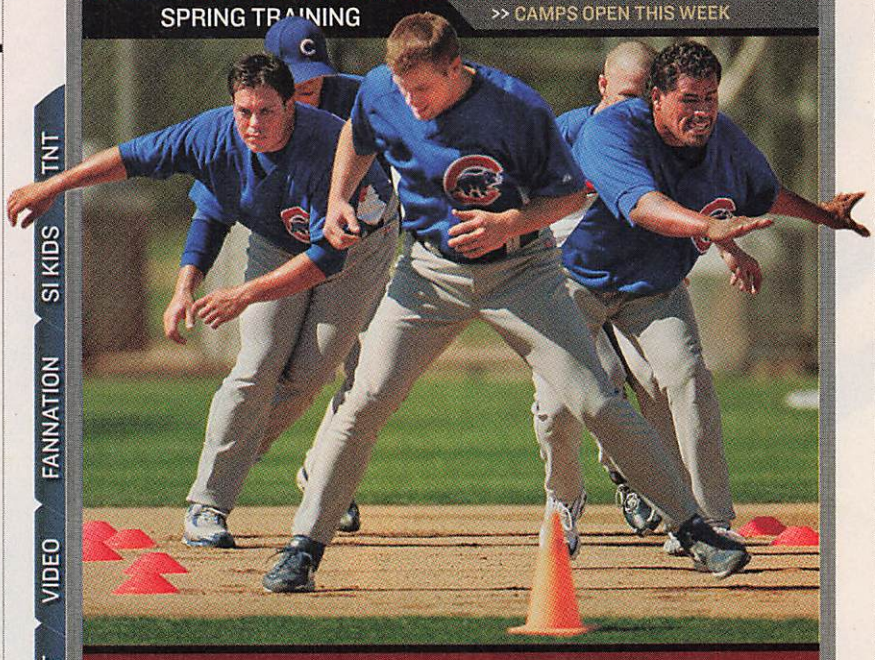

SPRING FORWARD WITH SI.COM

>> Pitchers and catchers report this week, and SI.com has everything you need to gear up for the baseball season. Coverage this month includes . . .

- **Team-by-team spring previews** Joe Sheehan of *Baseball Prospectus* breaks down each club and looks at which players have come and gone, the positional battles to watch and the moves that each team needs to make.
- **The top 100 prospects** *BP*'s minor league maven, Kevin Goldstein, ranks the game's best young players.
- **Inside analysis** Tom Verducci, Jon Heyman and John Donovan report from the Cactus and Grapefruit leagues.

**Plus much more** News, stats, schedules and continued coverage of the Roger Clemens steroid story.

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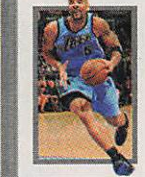
TRAFFIC REPORT

> **MOST VIEWED**
1. Mass shooting avoided at Super Bowl
2. Peter King: **Justin Tuck**, defense key to Giants' upset of Pats
3. Broadcaster rankings



> **OUR PICKS**
1. Stewart Mandel's early NCAA bracket
2. **Carlos Boozer**, Jazz top Marty Burns's NBA Power Rankings
3. Daily Hot Clicks

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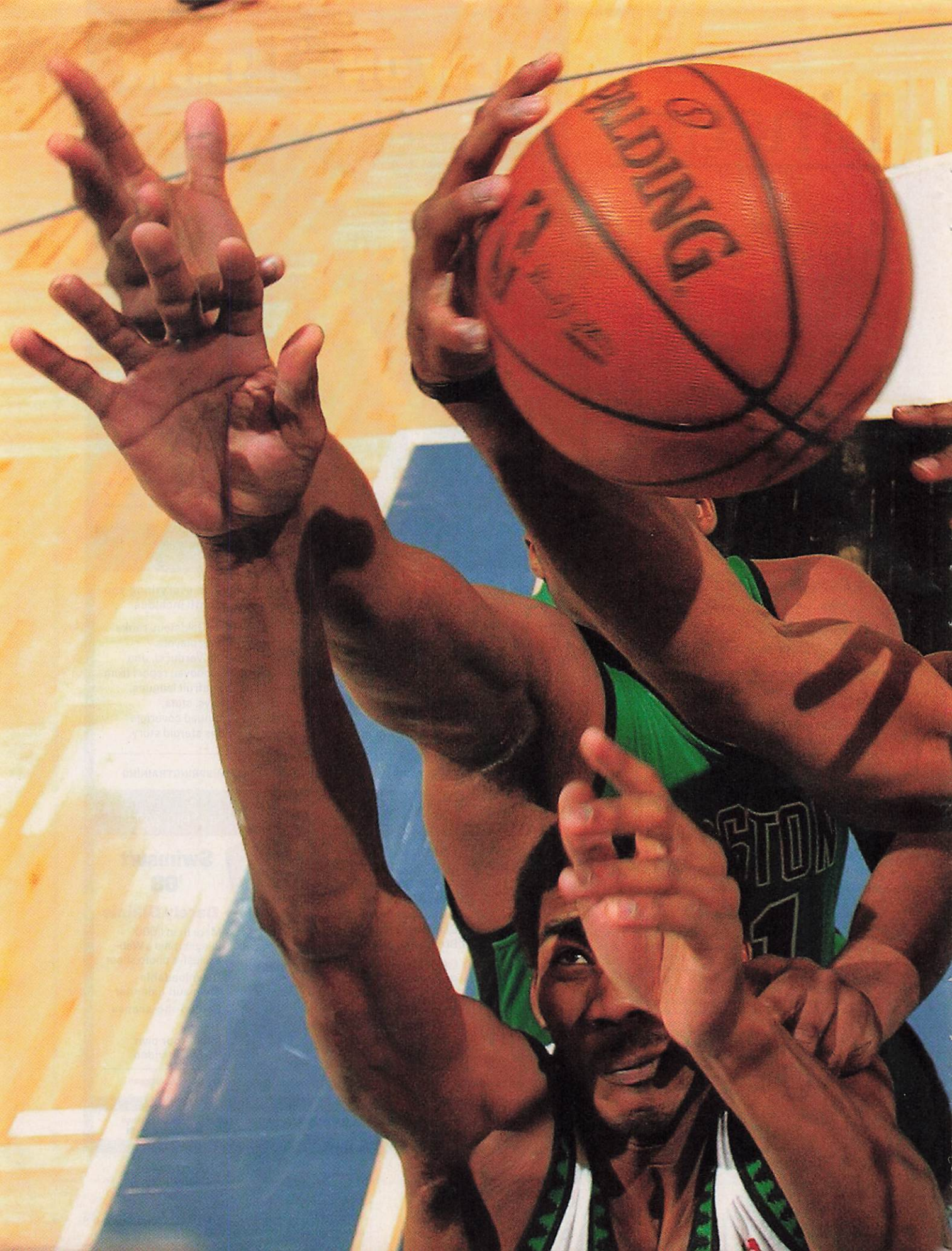
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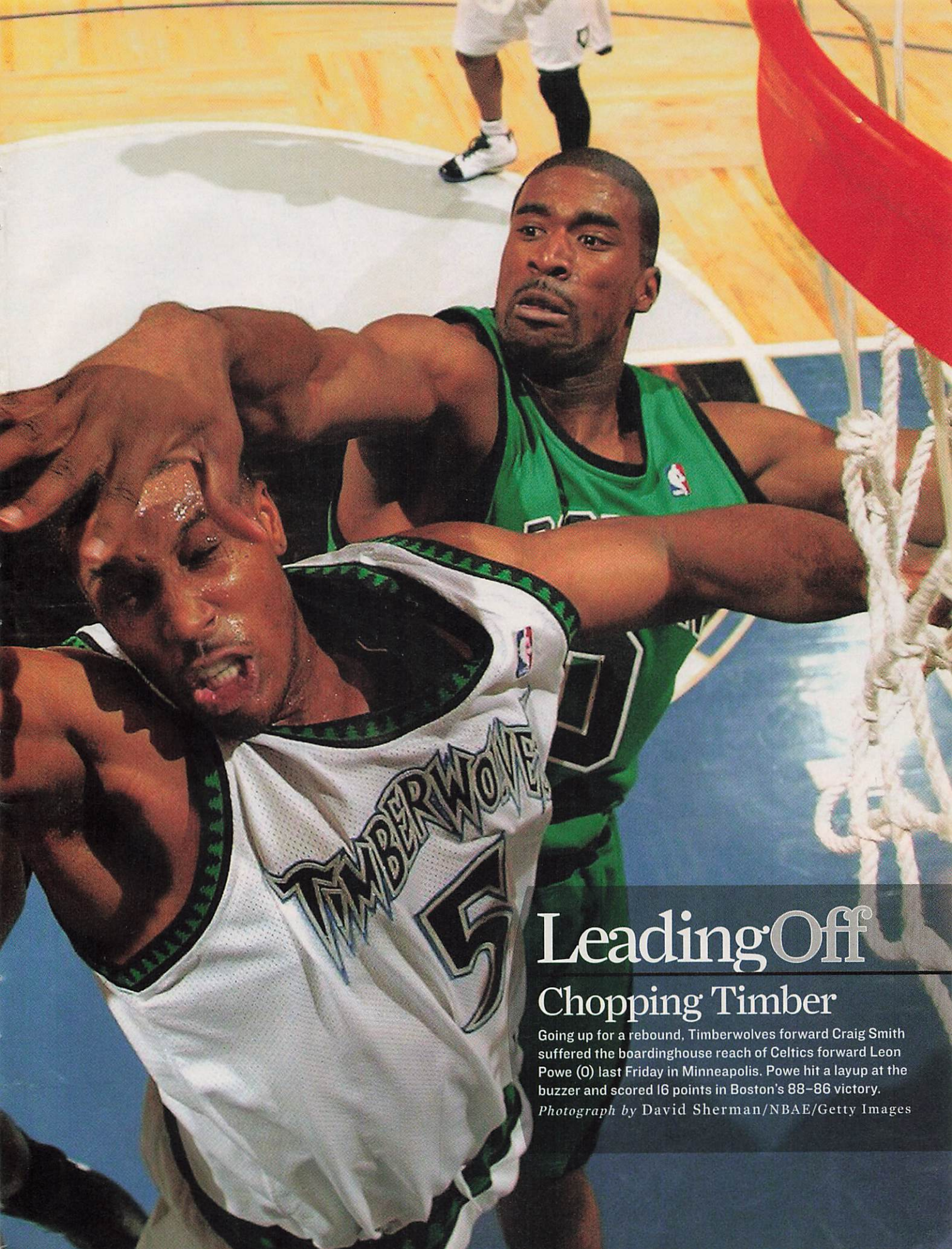
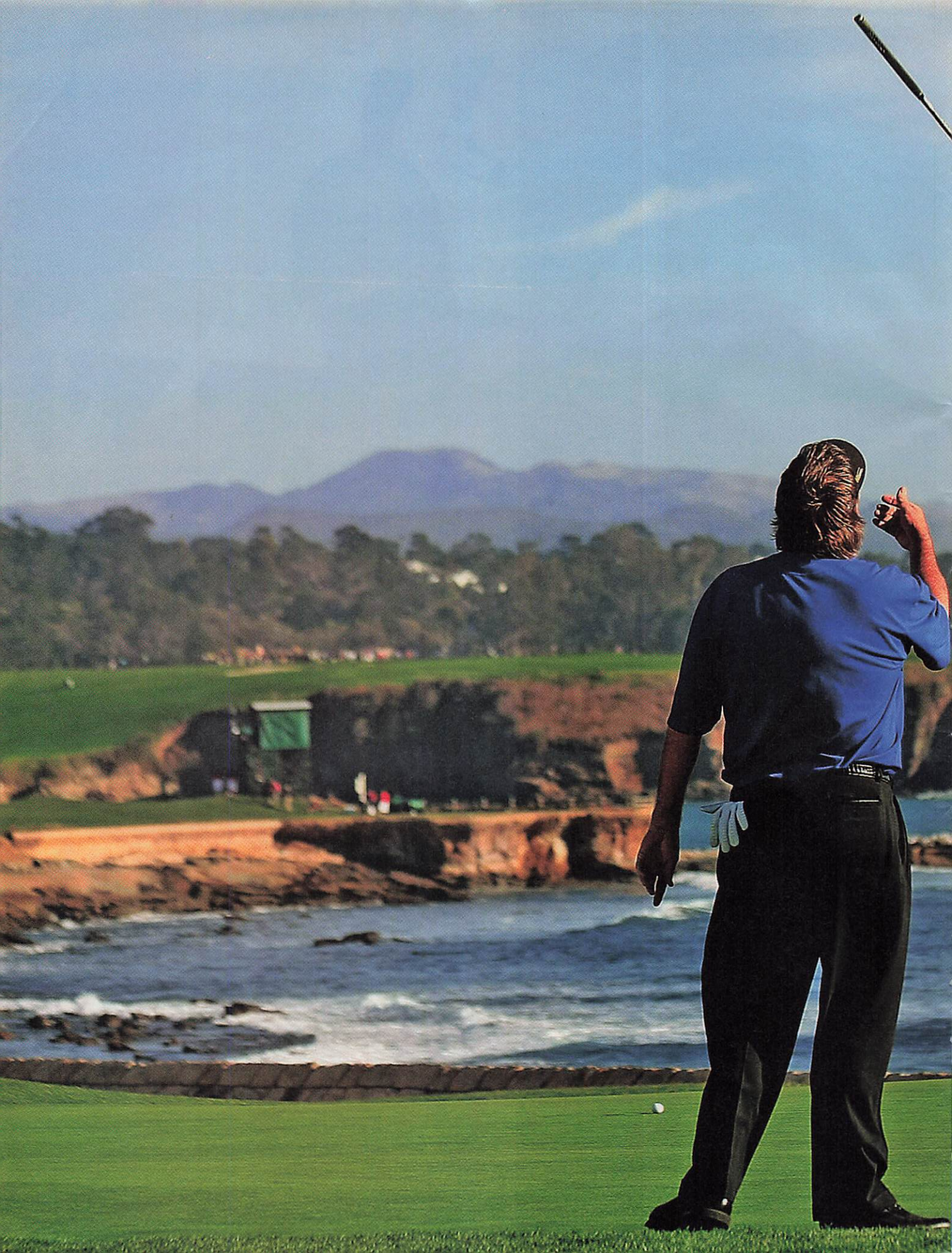



# Leading Off

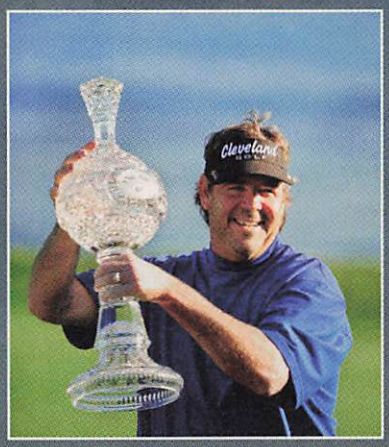
## Chopping Timber

Going up for a rebound, Timberwolves forward Craig Smith suffered the boardinghouse reach of Celtics forward Leon Powe (0) last Friday in Minneapolis. Powe hit a layup at the buzzer and scored 16 points in Boston's 88–86 victory.

*Photograph by* David Sherman/NBAE/Getty Images



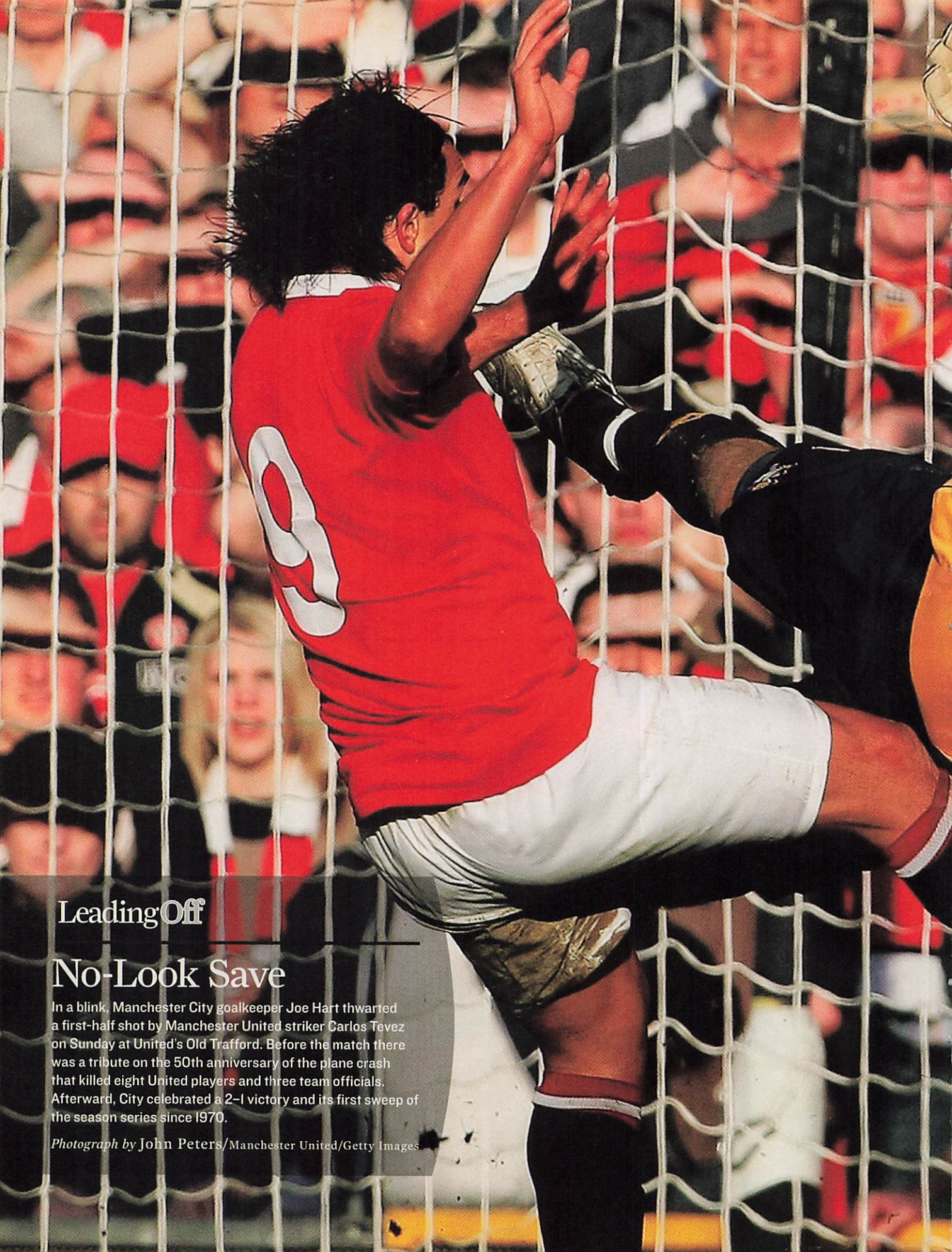
# Fit to Be Tied




ROBERT BECK

Steve Lowery flipped his putter after narrowly missing a 40-foot birdie on the 18th hole in Pebble Beach, Calif., on Sunday—a shot that would also have most likely sealed his third career victory. Moments later Vijay Singh birdied 18 to send the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am to a playoff, which Lowery won on the first hole (inset). At 47, he was the oldest champ in the 71-year history of the tournament.

*Photograph by* Stephen Dunn/Getty Images



## Leading Off

# No-Look Save

In a blink, Manchester City goalkeeper Joe Hart thwarted a first-half shot by Manchester United striker Carlos Tevez on Sunday at United's Old Trafford. Before the match there was a tribute on the 50th anniversary of the plane crash that killed eight United players and three team officials. Afterward, City celebrated a 2–1 victory and its first sweep of the season series since 1970.

*Photograph by* John Peters/Manchester United/Getty Images

## Get Behind Me, Peyton

Your cover describes Eli Manning, while leading the Giants to an upset win over the Packers in the NFC Championship Game in Green Bay, as "ignoring the cold and his brother Peyton's shadow" (*Destiny's Chill*, Jan. 28). No kidding—if you open the magazine, the first two spreads have ads featuring Peyton.

*Zac Hotter, Lime Lake, N.Y.*

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### Parting Shots

Football coach Rich Rodriguez's departure from West Virginia to Michigan, less than a year after basketball coach John Beilein made the same jump, angered many Mountaineers fans and had them bemoaning the unfairness of big-time college athletics (PLAYERS, Jan. 28). They should all remember it was only last April when West Virginia plucked basketball coach Bob Huggins from Kansas State in a move that left Kansas State fans equally upset and angry. If you want to compete in today's environment, there is little room for hurt feelings.

*David George Schmidt, Harleysville, Pa.*

Rodriguez did nothing more than accept a new job and a better opportunity for his family. Yet some Mountaineers fans felt that his decision warranted an innocent high school kid's receiving a death threat. West Virginia fans should take a lesson from their rivals at Marshall, who found out years ago that there are things much more devastating than losing a football coach to another school.

*Bart Jackson, Marysville, Ohio*

### Frontiere Justice

You wrote of the late Georgia Frontiere's tenure as Rams owner (PLAYERS, Jan. 28) that "it all worked." What exactly worked? Frontiere gutted a perennial playoff team, turned them into also-rans, chased away fans who had supported the Los Angeles Rams for nearly 50 years and then bolted for a sweetheart deal in St. Louis. May she rest in peace, but fans of the L.A. Rams have no fond memories of Frontiere.

*Robert Shannon, Chicago*

### Feeling Blue?

In your story on the NBA's Development League (*Who's Got Next*, Jan. 28), you had a group photograph of all the league's players. As a rabid Duke fan, I noticed a rather uninterested-looking Josh McRoberts, who left school early and was a second-round pick of Portland in the 2007 draft. I couldn't help but wonder if he would rather be playing for Coach K and the Blue Devils this year or bouncing between the Blazers and the Idaho Stampede. I'm sure if he knew that this was how it would all play out, he'd be back where he should be—with the Cameron Crazies.

*Luis Vega, Brooklyn*

### Screen Play

It's amazing what SI can do for a man. S.L. Price's *Big Game Hunter*, about his at long last buying a new television in advance of the Super Bowl (POINT AFTER, Jan. 28), made my wife see why it is important for men to hunt for that big screen. Now I have that TV I had always wanted!

*Chris Donoghue, Milton, Ont.*

Big game hunter? You only bought a 26-inch flat panel. That's like shooting a doe in buck season.

*Glenn Mahoney, Berwyn, Pa.*

Congratulations on your purchase of a new computer monitor.

*Jeff Nelson, Cincinnati*

### Wing Men

Stories like Chris Ballard's report from the scene at the Vegas Classic pigeon race (*The Birds*, Jan. 28) are the reason I am a lifetime subscriber to SPORTS ILLUSTRATED.

*Jamie McMillin, Colorado Springs*

Pigeon racing as sport? What next, an article on raising tropical fish?

*Bill Loeffler, Davidson, N.C.*

I was at the Vegas Classic, and I was embarrassed by the actions of a few of those at the race. As with other sporting events at which the beer flows and gambling is rampant, you could find individuals who were obnoxious and unruly. But that shouldn't diminish the accomplishments of the participants. I hope all those who read Ballard's story gain an appreciation for those one-pound balls of feathers that race home from a distance of hundreds of miles. Readers should also know that for most of us involved in the sport, pigeon racing is a family event that does not involve Elvis, drunks or gambling.

*Joe Nemelka, Mapleton, Utah*

### If You Don't Want the Swimsuit Issue

The annual SI Swimsuit Issue was published this week. If you're a new subscriber who after seeing this year's issue decides that you do not want to continue receiving it, call our customer-service center toll-free at 1-866-228-1175 and let us know. If you're a subscriber who has told us previously you do not want to receive it, your request will continue to be honored. If you choose not to receive the Swimsuit Issue, SI will extend your subscription.

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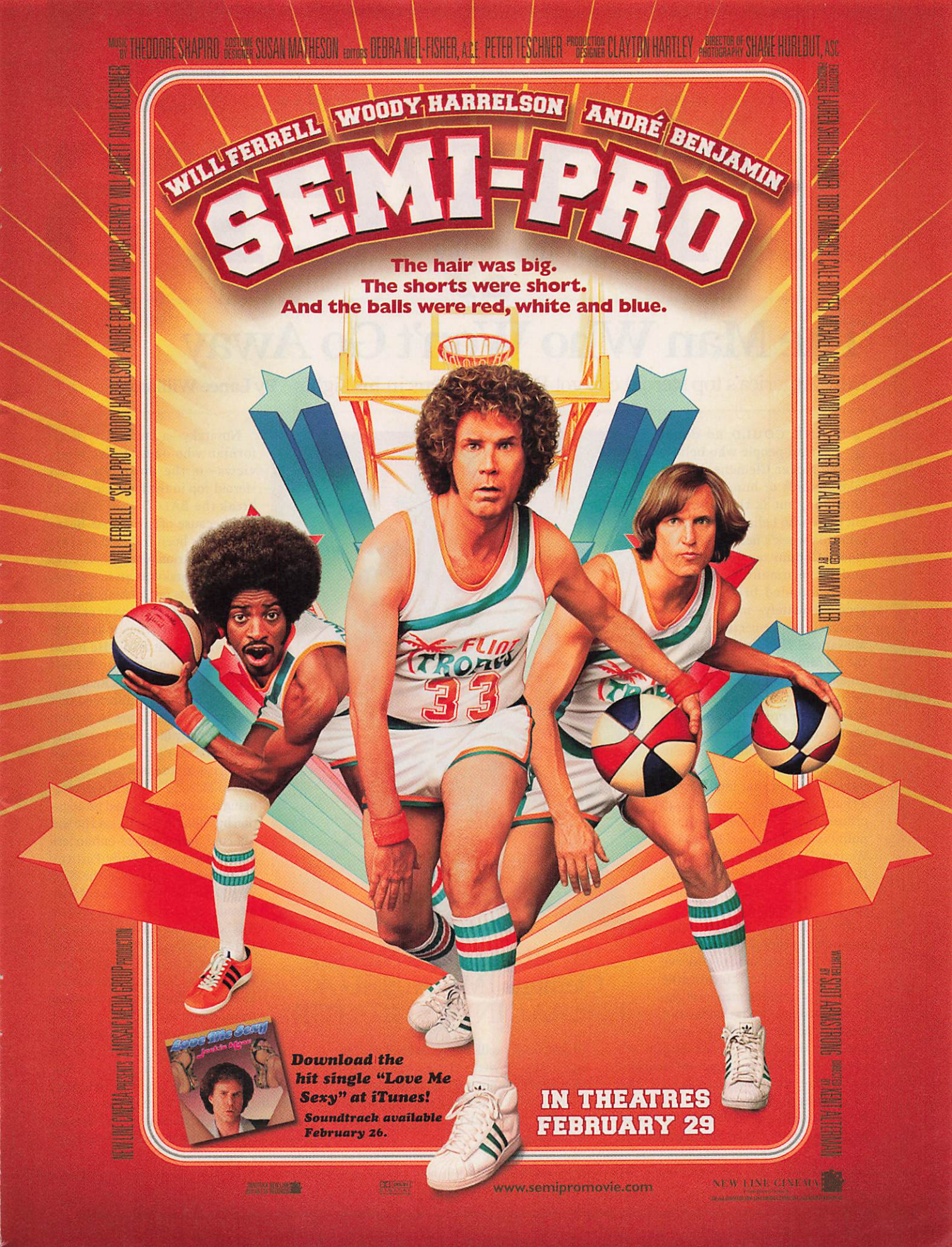
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LIFE ON AND OFF THE FIELD

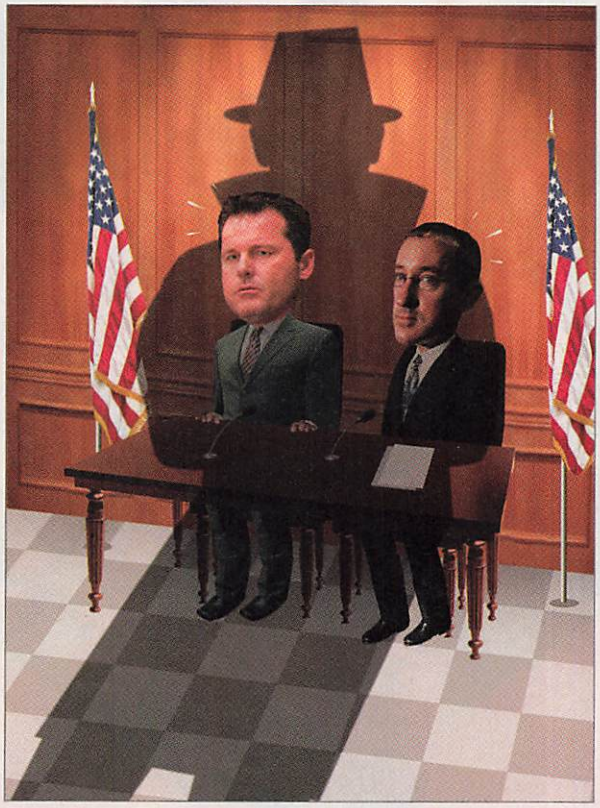
# Players

## The Man Who Won't Go Away

How America's top steroid cop got Roger Clemens in his sights **By Lance Williams**

ONE COULD no doubt find people who believe Roger Clemens did not take steroids or human growth hormone, but is there anyone out there who believes that going into this week's hearings by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, he had responded brilliantly—or even adequately—to the charges brought by his former trainer Brian McNamee? The YouTube clip and the *60 Minutes* interview, the infamous press conference at which he and his lawyer Rusty Hardin dramatically presented a recorded phone conversation with McNamee that proved maddeningly inconclusive, the statistical analysis of his pitching career that landed with a thud, the tour of congressional offices so he could meet with the politicians who would be posing Wednesday's questions—none of this helped, and much of it hurt, his cause, and to a degree that has yet to be calculated.

For Clemens didn't just string together a series of awkward moments for sports fans to observe and deconstruct; by attacking the credibility of McNamee, and the investigative methods that flushed him out, he impugned the tactics and thus the character of a certain IRS criminal investigator named Jeff Novitzky. By Sunday, Hardin was telling *The New York Times* that Novitzky was "brazen" for planning to attend Wednesday's hearings and saying, "If he ever messes with Roger, Roger will eat his lunch." Hardin told SI that Novitzky "is on a mission from God, and I cannot see how whether Roger Clemens did or did not use steroids has anything to do with the IRS." Not a smart thing to do.



"By attacking McNamee, Clemens **IMPUGNED A FEDERAL INVESTIGATOR.**"

Novitzky—a lanky 6' 7" Californian who doesn't give interviews—is the most renowned steroid cop in the land. He helped break the BALCO case in 2003, and because of his efforts Barry Bonds has been indicted for perjury and Marion Jones is headed to prison. Novitzky, as an IRS agent, usually starts out looking into the money-laundering aspects of illicit drug operations, then follows the trail wherever it leads. He found McNamee by busting former Mets clubhouse attendant Kirk Radomski in 2005. Radomski, informed that he was facing 25 years in prison, told Novitzky (and later baseball's Mitchell investigation) that he had sold drugs to dozens of ballplayers—and to McNamee. The latter, after being told he would avoid prosecution by telling the truth, said he had injected performance-enhancers into Clemens and Andy Pettitte. (According to reports in the New York *Daily News* last week, McNamee also told congressional staffers that he had injected Clemens's wife, Debbie, before a 2003 SI Swimsuit Issue photo shoot.) Clemens and Hardin say all of this is nonsense and that McNamee was pressured by the agent to tell lies.

Whether Novitzky is angry at Clemens and Hardin for disparaging his motives and techniques is not known—but even if the investigator is peeved, that is not their biggest worry. More to the point is that Novitzky seems to believe that Clemens used illegal drugs between 1998 and 2001,



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when he pitched for the Blue Jays and the Yankees, just as McNamee has said. It is well known that Novitzky can be relentless. A former Justice Department official notes that the BALCO case was "agent-driven," with Novitzky doggedly gathering evidence, then trying to persuade prosecutors to bring indictments.

Novitzky hasn't slowed down. Weeks before Hardin had publicly lashed out at him, questioning to SI why Novitzky had told "a felon we won't prosecute you for felonies if you give us information that can only be used to destroy someone's reputation," the agent was playing what could be a key role in a case against Clemens. On Jan. 10, in a private meeting at a Manhattan law office, McNamee, finally seeming to give up on the idea of being Clemens's buddy, produced a cache of used syringes and gauze supposedly tainted with the residue of steroids and Clemens's blood. The needles, as well as the battered beer can in which they were stored, are now being tested. Any resulting evidence could conceivably be used against Clemens if the House Oversight committee recommends the case to the Justice Department for further investigation.

Novitzky, it's true, has been accused of being overzealous. According to a defamation lawsuit filed by Clemens, McNamee complained about the tough techniques of Novitzky and assistant U.S. Attorney Matt Parrella to two private detectives hired by the pitcher. McNamee, who was secretly taped during the December meeting, said he implicated Clemens only after being threatened with jail time. And BALCO founder Victor Conte once asked a judge to throw out his indictment, complaining that after a 2003 interrogation, Novitzky falsely reported that Conte had named athletes to whom he gave banned drugs. "Novitzky lies, and big time," Conte wrote in an e-mail to the *San Francisco Chronicle* at the time. But one of McNamee's lawyers, Richard Emery, tells SI, "Novitzky and Parrella acted completely properly and appropriately with a witness they knew they had evidence on. . . . There was no unreasonable pressure and Brian realizes that." Conte, meanwhile, later withdrew the motion and pleaded guilty. The fact remains that some of the loudest complaints about Novitzky have come from drug dealers and users. In attacking Novitzky, Clemens's legal team is, at the very least, keeping bad company. □

*Lance Williams is a reporter for the* San Francisco Chronicle *and a co-author of* Game of Shadows.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN UELAND; JOSE LUIS MAJANA/AP (MCNAMEE); CHRISTOPHER PASATIERI/US PRESSWIRE (SELANNE); DAVID E. KLUTHO (SAMUELSSON); GREG NELSON (BRADY); MIKE BLAKE/REUTERS (WEST); CHUCK BURTON/AP (O'NEAL); JOHN W. MCDONOUGH (BRYANT); JOSHUA ROBERTS/REUTERS (ZORN)

# WHO'S Hot

## Ducks

With sharpshooter Teemu Selanne *(above)* out of semiretirement, Anaheim couldn't lose. The Ducks dined out in New York (beating the Islanders, Rangers and Devils), then won in Detroit. Coming up: seven straight games at home on the Pond.

## Steve Lowery

Big belly, bad wrist, two double bogeys on Saturday—nothing could keep the 47-year-old, then 305th-ranked golfer from victory at Pebble Beach. Beating the, uh, somewhat more accomplished Vijay Singh (ranked No. 10) in a playoff gave Lowery his third win in 519 career PGA events. Sunday's, he said, was "absolutely my most meaningful."

## Jim Zorn

Already a legend in the state of Washington—the lefty threw 107 TDs as the Seahawks' first-ever QB—he's now the man of the hour in Washington, D.C. The Redskins' new head coach (his deal is worth about $15 million over five years) was a surprise hire, even to himself: "Miraculous," he called it.

## Wests

The Hornets' David West *(page 32)* is averaging a career-high 19.6 points in the thrilling Western Conference (176–131) against the East this year). As for carrying New Orleans to a win on Sunday with 33 points? That, as Grammy winner Kanye West *(right)* might say, can only make him stronger.

# Not

## Red Wings

The home loss to Anaheim isn't shameful—not even to the NHL's top team—but falling to cellar-dwellers Toronto and L.A.? More pain: the slap shot from Detroit forward Mikael Samuelsson *(above)* that broke the jaw of 20-goal teammate Dan Cleary.

## Phil Mickelson

Who'd have thought this one would go to 11? The defending Pebble Beach champ shot that number on the 14th hole last Saturday ensuring that he'd miss the cut. It's the highest single-hole score in Lefty's career, and four holes later he hit a tee shot into the Pacific. "It happens," said Mickelson of his double-digiter. "Unfortunately."

## John Brady

Though something of a legend around LSU—at 192–139 he's the third-winningest coach in the school's hoops history—Brady's now unemployed. It was a surprise fire to some (he took LSU to the Final Four in 2006), but Brady was 8–13 this year. Said AD Skip Bertman, "He just didn't win enough games."

## Male Bears

The women at Baylor (14 wins in 15 games) and Cal (13 of 14) may be cruising to the tournament, but the men are lumbering. Baylor has lost three of four, surrendering a seven-point lead and a potential upset to Kansas, while Cal has dropped four of seven after getting trounced at home by Oregon.

## SI PLAYERS NBA POLL

**Which opposing player scares you the most to play against?**

<< **Kobe Bryant, Lakers G.....35%**
Shaquille O'Neal, Suns C.....12% >>
Kevin Garnett, Celtics F..... 6%
LeBron James, Cavs F..... 4%
Dwight Howard, Magic C..... 4%

**FAST FACTS** Poll was completed before O'Neal (page 35) was traded from the Heat to the Suns last week. . . . Bryant particularly unnerves forwards, who gave him more than 41% of their vote. . . . Among players 35 and older, 63% voted for Bryant, who led the league in points, field goals and field goal attempts this season, as well as the last two.

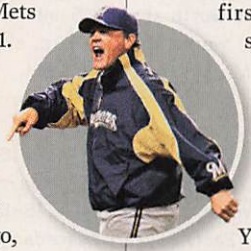
[Based on a survey of 242 NBA Players] • For more on the poll, and to comment on it, go to SI.com/players.

# For the Record

**Won** By **Lindsey Vonn (above)** in Sestriere, Italy, last Saturday, the ninth World Cup downhill of her career, tying her with Picabo Street and Daron Rahlves as the most successful U.S. downhill skiers ever. Vonn, 23, easily beat Canada's Kelly Vanderbeek with a time of 1:38.86; as her split times decreased during the 1.84-mile run, the Sestriere race announcer yelled, "She's a speed train!" Vonn now has four downhill wins this season and finished the weekend tied for the overall World Cup points lead. "Lindsey is pretty much unbeatable now," said U.S. downhill coach Alex Hoedlmoser.

**Died** At age 83, **Karl Ehrhardt (below)**, better known as Shea Stadium's Sign Man. From 1964 to '81 Ehrhardt, a graphic artist, was a fixture at Mets games, where his witty, block-lettered signs served as instantaneous editorials on the team's play. Whenever outfielder Jose Cardenal went down with one of his many strikeouts, Ehrhardt held up one that read, JOSE, CAN YOU SEE?; during the Mets' 1969 World Series appearance he asked (11 years before the Lake Placid Olympics), DO YOU BELIEVE IN MIRACLES? Ehrhardt, who carried dozens of signs to games and at one point had nearly 1,200 to choose from, stopped going to Shea after a fallout with Mets management in 1981.

**Died** At age 79, longtime National League umpire Ed Vargo. During a 23-year career that began in 1960, Vargo, a onetime minor league catcher, worked four World Series and four All-Star Games and officiated over several historic moments. He was behind the plate when Hank Aaron tied Babe Ruth's mark of 714 home runs in 1974, and he worked the first World Series night game, in '71. He is also the only umpire to be behind the plate for a no-hitter and a perfect game by the same pitcher: He called Sandy Koufax's June 4, 1964, no-hitter and was there for Koufax's perfect game a year later.



**Levied** By the team formerly known as the Devil Rays, fines for people who continue to refer to the club as diabolic. In November the franchise became known simply as the Rays and since then has maintained "Drop the Devil" donation boxes in its offices: Every time an employee uses the term *Devil Rays*, he or she is expected to donate $1 to the team's official charity, the Rays Baseball Foundation. On Feb. 1 team president Matt Silverman sent a letter to David Pinto, author of the blog baseballmusings.com, citing his recent name "violation" and asking for a contribution. Wrote Silverman, "Please note that repeat violations may carry a steeper penalty."

**Forgotten** By the Brewers, an announcement that the 2009 contract option for manager **Ned Yost (below, left)** was exercised. The option was picked up in October, after Milwaukee had gone 83–79—its first winning season since 1992—and finished a surprising second in the NL Central. When a reporter asked Brewers G.M. Doug Melvin about Yost's status last Friday, Melvin realized that the club had never said publicly that Yost's contract had been extended. "We just completely forgot about it," Melvin said. The Brewers made an official announcement later that day.

**Recovering** After undergoing lifesaving surgery on Sunday night to repair a severed carotid artery, Panthers forward Richard Zednik. In the third period of a loss to the Sabres that evening, Zednik's teammate Olli Jokinen was upended in the corner, sending his right leg and skate flying upward. The blade struck Zednik, who was skating nearby, in the throat; with blood gushing from his neck, he was able to skate to the bench and was immediately taken away by ambulance. Despite losing a significant amount of blood, Zednik was in stable condition after the surgery, according to his agent, David Schatia.

## They Said It

**PAUL MAURICE**
**Maple Leafs coach, on what was going through his mind at the end of an 8–0 loss to Florida:**

"Mostly profanity."

## SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

NBC is planning a curling reality show, hosted by Bruce Springsteen and Jon Bon Jovi, on which contestants will vie for a spot on the 2010 Olympic team.

ALBERTO PIZZOLI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES (VONN); LENNY IGNELZI/AP (YOST); ELLEN OZIER/REUTERS (MAURICE); AP (EHRHARDT)

Sports Illustrated

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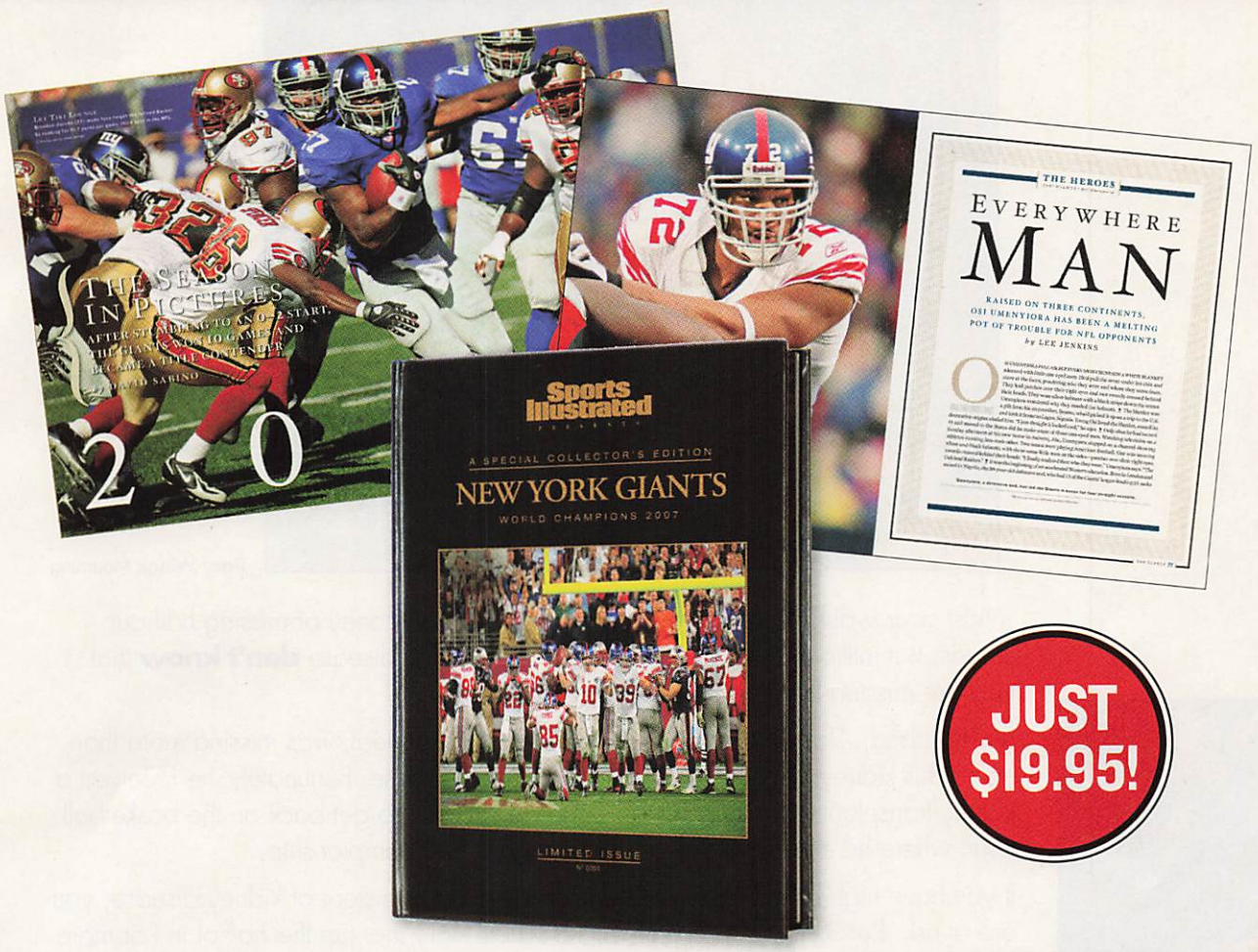


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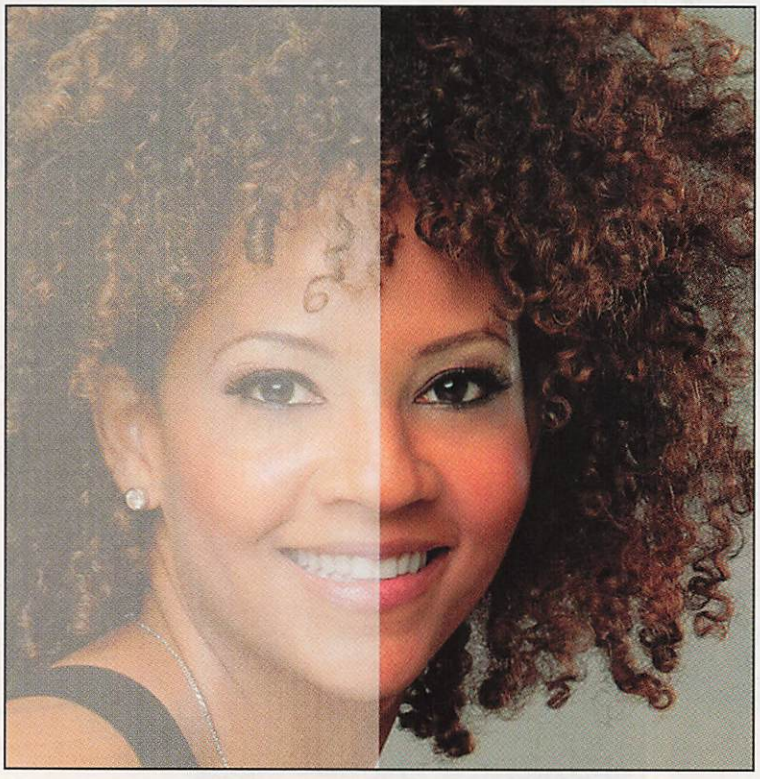
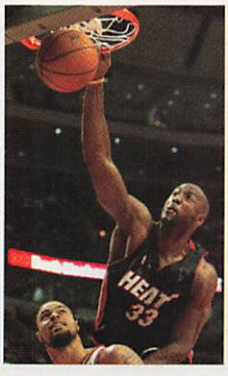
# CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE:
## Most Of Us Don't Know The Half Of It.



Tracy Wilson Mourning




JONATHAN DANIEL/GETTY IMAGES

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My husband, Alonzo Mourning of the NBA's Miami Heat, was missing more than half of his kidney function due to chronic kidney disease. Fortunately, he received a kidney transplant that saved his life and enabled him to get back on the basketball court where he eventually helped his team win the championship.

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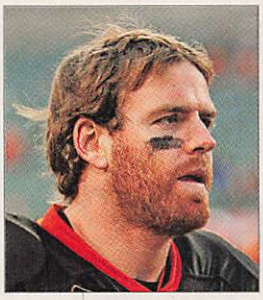
# Brothers in Arms

## For the Bengals, two Palmers are better than one

JORDAN PALMER looks like an NFL quarterback. That's not only because, at 6' 5" and 232 pounds, he has the archetypical stature of a drop-back passer—but also because the blue-eyed, ginger-haired 23-year-old bears a striking resemblance to his older brother Carson, the Pro Bowl quarterback of the Bengals. Jordan routinely gets blitzed by autograph seekers who mistake him for Carson, and he'll probably cause greater confusion after signing a two-year pact with the Bengals on Jan. 30 for a shot to back up big bro. "If I win a job," Jordan says, "Carson knows he'll have a guy who will support him on and off the field, push him in practice and do the things a backup is supposed to do."



**BRO FOOTBALL** Carson (left) and Jordan could be teammates for the first time.

Jordan **(right)**, who set UTEP career records for passing yards (11,084) and touchdowns (88), was drafted by the Redskins in the sixth round last year but was cut before the season opener. After tryouts with the Saints, Bills, Giants and Seahawks, he was days away from beginning an Arena League season with the Arizona Rattlers when Cincinnati called. The Bengals like Jordan's strong arm and sound mechanics, not to mention his gene pool, and he'll begin competing for a spot at organized team activities this spring. "He's got his work cut out for him," says Carson **(above)**.

If Jordan sticks, it will be the first time since the AFL-NFL merger in 1970 that QB brothers play on the same team.

Jordan, the youngest of four children (he and Carson have a sister and another brother), grew up an avid violin player and started at quarterback at Mission Viejo (Calif.) High his senior year—about the time Carson was being drafted No. 1 overall out of USC. The brothers, who often surf and golf together, have never played on the same football team, and while Jordan harbors no delusions of pushing Carson for the starting job, the Palmers' setup could soon be the envy of many a football dad, even, perhaps, Archie Manning. The best thing about the signing, according to Bill Palmer, the QBs' father? (He's a benefits consultant and former high school tight end.) "A visit there, we get two for one."

*—Andrew Lawrence*

# Go Figure

**524** Games UConn's women's hoops team has played without back-to-back losses, a streak that dates to 1993.

**3:58.05** Winning time by Russia's Yelena Soboleva in the 1,500 meters at the Russian indoor track championships, which broke her own world record.

**$350,000** Amount that actress Salma Hayek bid at a New York charity auction to win a one-hour soccer lesson with David Beckham.

**$2.6 million** Amount that Nevada sports books lost ($92.1 million was wagered) on the Super Bowl, a record.

**$400,000** Net amount the books paid out on the 49ers' 1995 win over the Chargers, their only other Super Bowl loss since '91.

# Where 'Wrong' T's Go

**THERE ARE** places where Eli Manning didn't make the Throw, David Tyree missed the Catch and the Patriots went 19–0. Those places are Nicaragua and Romania. Before the Super Bowl, NFL contractors produced T-shirts and hats commemorating a New England title; of course, Giants gear went into circulation. This week World Vision, a Federal Way, Wash., nonprofit, will deliver the historically incorrect Pats stuff—along with school and medical supplies—to needy families in those nations. "When it comes to people who only have the shirts on their backs, you can't emphasize enough" how important the clothing is, says World Vision's Karen Kartes. "It's the ultimate form of recycling."

Once, the NFL destroyed unused Super Bowl gear. But in 1994 the league teamed with World Vision, with one key stipulation: that donated clothing go far, far away. (Says NFL director of community affairs David Krichavsky, "It's not something we want out on the street or on eBay.") The first shipment—Bills items from Super Bowl XXVIII—ended up in Africa, and since then other leagues have struck deals with World Vision. Baseball donated unused World Series items last year; the NBA distributes merchandise through its Basketball Without Borders program. Exact numbers aren't available yet, but the NFL thinks New England's loss produced an unprecedented volume of unsalable material. (Last year the Bears' Super defeat resulted in $2.5 million in clothing.) Says Kartes, what might have been trash will instead likely become "the first new clothes the recipients have ever owned." *—Pablo S. Torre*

FRANK VICTORES/US PRESSWIRE (CARSON PALMER); THOMAS B. SHEA /US PRESSWIRE (JORDAN PALMER, JORDAN ACTION); ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES (CARSON ACTION); KEITH SRAKOCIC/AP (T-SHIRTS); ©2007 LEAH MISSBACH DAY/WORLD VISION (KIDS)

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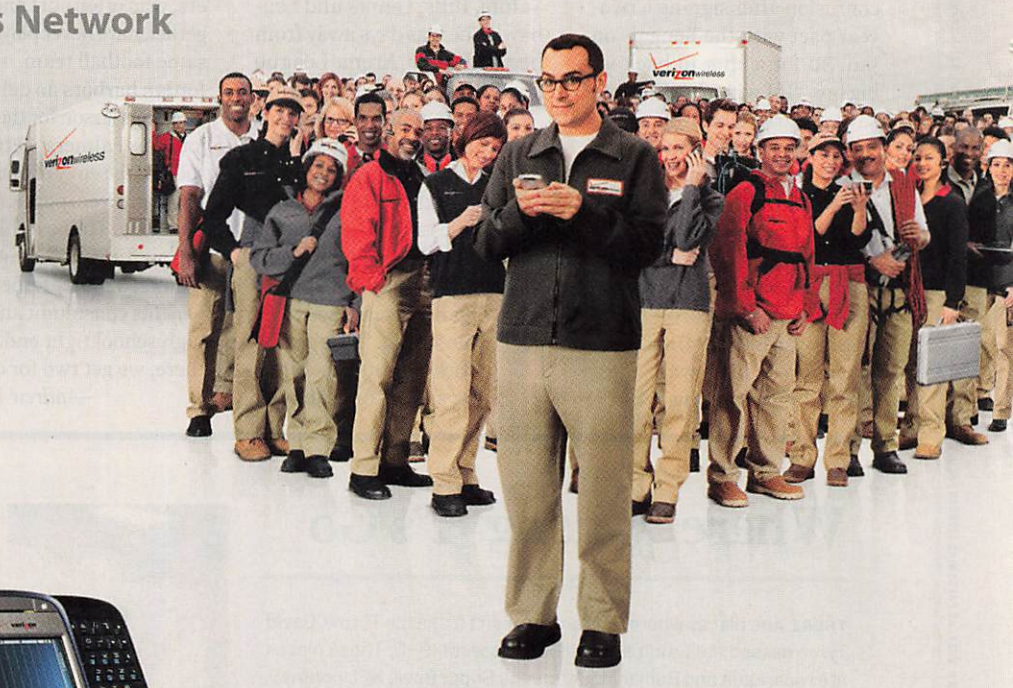

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FIRST PERSON

# Osi Umenyiora

**GIANTS DEFENSIVE END**

"I was surprised to be the only Giant to go to the Pro Bowl. We have the greatest line in the league."

**On his post–Super Bowl celebration**

I wish I had a good story about going out afterward, but I knew it would be mayhem out there, so I just chilled in my room. I stayed with my brother [Ejimofor] and a friend and watched the highlights over and over. I couldn't get enough of those highlights.

**On girlfriend, and SI swimsuit model, Selita Ebanks**

She came out to the Super Bowl, to do an event for Victoria's Secret, so she was at the game. I'll have to try to come up with something good for Valentine's Day. I haven't celebrated it in so long.

**On going straight from Arizona to the Pro Bowl in Hawaii, thus missing the Giants' victory parade**

I decided early on that I would do it that way, win or lose the Super Bowl. I hate to fly, and if I had flown all the way back to New York and then to Hawaii, it would have been almost 20 hours on the plane. Or else I wouldn't have made it to Hawaii, and I felt I should be there to represent the Giants.

**On watching the parade**

It was on at about 5:00 a.m. here, but I saw it live. I texted the guys during the parade—[teammates] Justin Tuck, Barry Cofield, Michael Strahan. They told me it was crazy. Two million people. That's madness.

**On mixing with Patriots players at the Pro Bowl**

We didn't really talk about the game. I talked to Asante Samuel, and he said congratulations. They can't really hate on the performance we put on. They played pretty well. We just played better.

**On playing the Dolphins last October in London, where he was born and lived for seven years before moving to Nigeria**

The best part was that my mother [Chinelo] came from Nigeria. It was the first time that she had ever seen me play in person.

**On the meaning of his full first name, Ositadinma, in the Igbo language**

From today, things will be good.

*—As told to Lisa Altobelli*

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIAN BIELMANN

# The Game's the Thing

## An ex-NFL star makes his Off-Broadway debut

IN THE autumn of 1987 Bo Eason was a heat-seeking All-Pro safety for the Houston Oilers, one of the NFL's most feared—and loathed—players. The Oilers were scheduled to play the Patriots in Week 5, presenting a problem for Bo: New England's quarterback was Tony Eason, his older brother by 17 months, meaning Bo would be expected to intercept, blitz and otherwise bring misfortune upon his blood kin. As the showdown neared, Bo was so conflicted, he told SI, that he thought, "Maybe, if I remove my contacts, I won't be able to see Tony's face and no brotherhood can creep into the game."

**PLAY ACTION** Eason leaped from All-Pro to playwright.

NFL players went on strike three weeks before that game, preventing an Eason-versus-Eason encounter. But Bo, now 46 and an actor and a playwright, kept wondering what would have happened if the game had gone on. He explores the possibilities grippingly in the one-man play *Runt of the Litter*, which he wrote and stars in. *Runt*—now having a successful Off-Broadway run—is set an hour before a fictional AFC Championship Game: Eason plays Jack, a cocksure Oilers safety about to take the field against his older brother, Charlie, "the greatest quarterback of all time." In a series of stirring locker-room soliloquies and animated family anecdotes, Jack explains that he is the runt of six siblings, an undersized scrub who compensated by waking up at the crack of dawn to catch 1,000 balls every morning for 20 years. It was all done to keep pace with Charlie, for whom everything came easy, and to fulfill their father's NFL dreams for his sons.

Eason's script strays into tangential, Warren Sapp–style rants (such as five minutes on the illegitimacy of the Hall of Fame). But Eason's performance is powerful, and *Runt* is a touching study of a player's dueling allegiances to family and team. The choice isn't as clear-cut as you'd think. "I will color the field red with [Charlie's] blood and drown him in it," Jack bellows, spewing decades of frustration and sibling rivalry. Bo Eason seems to think that mentality might have gotten the best of him in 1987: At one point Jack hisses, "I am blinded." It's a startling moment, and it's easy to envision Tony Eason cringing—and giving thanks that he never peered into the opposing backfield and saw Bo. —*Adam Duerson*

# The Pop Culture Grid

| How do sports stars fit in? | Valentine's Day makes me want to . . . | Best thing I read last week | Favorite dessert | Person you're dying to have in your Five? | ____should have been on the SI Swimsuit cover |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **KYLE SINGLER** Duke *F* | Send my mom flowers | *Pistol: The Life of Pete Maravich* | Tapioca pudding | Dick Vitale *(left)* | Eva Mendes |
| **PATRICK KANE** Blackhawks *RW* | Lie in bed with a girl | *The Hockey News* | Vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce | Taylor Swift *(right)* | Taylor Swift |
| **ANDRIS BIEDRINS** Warriors *C* | Spend an evening with the person I love | The paper | Crème brûlée | Zarko Cabarkapa (teammate) | Carmen Electra |
| **BRANDON DUBINSKY** Rangers *C* | Do something special | *The Keys To Success* (by George Leonard) | Raspberry cheesecake | Tiger Woods | Taylor Swift |

# The Beat

**UPPER DECK** initially included **Senator Hillary Clinton** in a set of election-themed trading cards to be released this year, but the caricature on the cards **(below)** wasn't exactly presidential. Clinton was depicted as 1980s stadium fixture **Morganna the Kissing Bandit**—short shorts and all. Last week Upper Deck decided the illustration was too unflattering and recalled the cards. A few slipped out, however, and bidding on eBay reached $1,375. . . . Good news on the Bad Newz Kennel front. Twenty-two of the pit bulls seized from **Michael Vick**'s dog-fighting compound have been moved to the Best Friends Animal Society in Utah, and a National Geographic Channel reality series called *Dogtown* will follow their recovery this summer. Friends staffers are blogging about the "Vicktory dogs" at bestfriends.org. Of a scarred pit bull named Lucas, one staffer wrote, "[He] is still nothing but kisses and smiles." . . . *Semi-Pro* star **Will Ferrell** might have another athlete role left in him. He is coproducing an HBO series called *East Bound and Down*, about a "**John Rocker**–type" who crashes and burns before heading home to teach P.E. in North Carolina. —A.D.

## Celebrity Central

For updated sports and celebrity news, go to **SI.com/extramustard.**

JOAN MARCUS (EASON); BOB ROSATO (SINGLER); RICHARD WOLOWICZ/ICON SMI (KANE); GREG NELSON (BIEDRINS); BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE NHL (DUBINSKY); ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL JIMENEZ (CUPID); JOHN BIEVER (VITALE); DAN STEINBERG/AP (SWIFT)

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May 2: Kentucky Oaks: 5-6pm ET ESPN2
May 3: Breakfast at Churchill Downs: 11a-12p ET ESPN2
May 3: Today at the Kentucky Derby: 12-3pm ET ESPN
May 3: The Kentucky Derby Special: 3-5pm ET ESPN
May 3: Red Carpet Show: 4:30-5pm ET NBC
May 3: The Kentucky Derby: 5-6:30pm ET NBC

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# Week Ahead

## What to watch and watch for By Sarah Kwak

FRIDAY 2/15

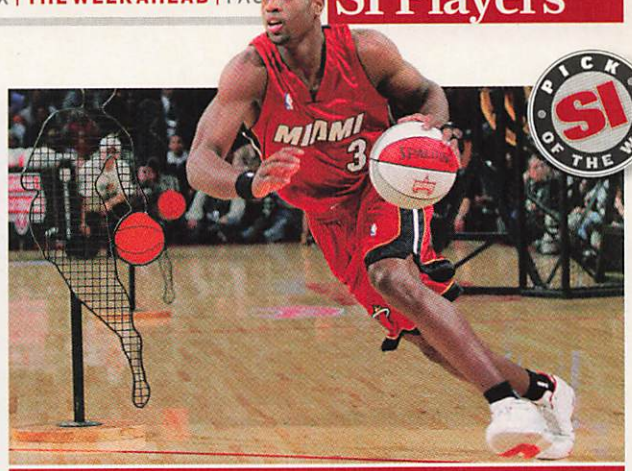
**No. 21 Pittsburgh at No. 16 Marquette** The Golden Eagles have been part of the Big East only since 2005, but Pitt-Marquette games already feel like grudge matches. "Since I've been here, we've developed a rivalry with Pitt," says Marquette junior guard **Dominic James (right)**, who is averaging 13.5 points and leads the team with 88 assists. The four regular-season meetings James has been part of have been decided by six points or less, and he has helped Marquette win three of them. **ESPN 9 p.m.**

SATURDAY 2/16

**Kelly Pavlik vs. Jermain Taylor** After Pavlik handed him his first defeat five months ago **(left)**, former middleweight champ Taylor brought back his first trainer, Ozell Nelson, to prepare for tonight's rematch in Las Vegas. Taylor (27-1-1) thinks Nelson will help him get past what he called the "butt-kicking" Pavlik delivered in Atlantic City. Says Pavlik's trainer, Jack Loew, "I want to thank Jermain for bringing the guy back who taught him all of his bad habits." **PPV 9 p.m.**

SUNDAY 2/17

**Daytona 500** Could this be the year that a foreign manufacturer wins the Great American Race? With Joe Gibbs Racing—home of Tony Stewart, Denny Hamlin and Kyle Busch—making the switch to Toyota this season, the chances have improved that one of the 11 Japanese cars entered will capture the checkered flag at Daytona's 50th running. During testing, Toyota logged five of the top 10 speeds at the raceway. **Fox 2 p.m.**



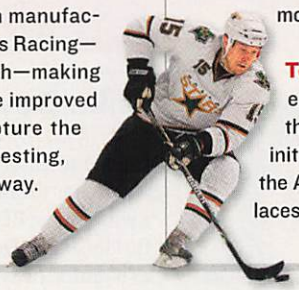

PICK OF THE WEEK

SATURDAY 2/16

### NBA All-Star Skills Challenge

**Dwyane Wade (above)** hasn't done much winning this season—the Heat still hadn't gotten its victory total into double digits by Monday—but there's one event the Miami guard knows he can dominate. Wade is the two-time defending Skills Challenge champion. In New Orleans he'll match his ball handling and obstacle-course-navigating skills against 2003 champ Jason Kidd of the Nets, hometown favorite Chris Paul and Jazz guard Deron Williams. Wade will also start for the Eastern Conference in Sunday's All-Star Game. **TNT 8:30 p.m.**

**Red Wings at Stars** Note to Detroit: If this game is close, keep the puck off the stick of **Niklas Hagman (left)**. The Dallas winger is tied for second in the NHL with seven game-winning goals; he has two this month, against the Flames and the Wild. **NBC 3:30 p.m.**



**Texas Tech at No. 21 Texas A&M** Nearly 1,000 women's high school and college teams will have a rosier outlook this week. As part of Think Pink, a breast cancer awareness initiative by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association, the Aggies and Lady Raiders will take the court sporting pink laces, pink T-shirts and pink uniform trim. **ESPN2 4 p.m.**

BOB ROSATO (JAMES); SUE OGROCKI/AP (WADE); RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES (HAGMAN); DAVID GARD/AP IMAGES (FIGHT)

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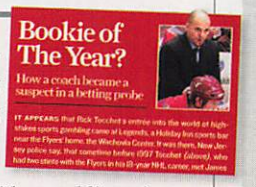
SI, Feb. 20, 2006

# Update


Bookie of The Year?

How a coach became a suspect in a betting probe

IT APPEARS that Rick Tocchet's entree into the world of high-stakes sports gambling came at Legends, a Holiday Inn sports bar near the Flyers' home, the Wachovia Center. It was there, New Jersey police say, that sometime before 1997 Tocchet (above), who had two stints with the Flyers in his 18-year NHL career, met James

Two years after learning he was being investigated for his part in a nationwide gambling ring, Coyotes associate coach Rick Tocchet's NHL ban has ended, and he's resumed his place next to longtime pal and Phoenix head coach Wayne Gretzky. Last May, Tocchet, 43, pleaded guilty to two gambling-related charges, which were related to his taking bets on football, and got two years' probation. He returns to a Coyotes club that is eyeing its first playoff spot since 2002. "This makes us better," G.M. Don Maloney says of Tocchet's return. "We were lacking just what Rick can bring to us."

The Coyotes ranked 14th on the power play, and they believe Tocchet, who scored 130 of his 440 career goals with the man advantage, will add insight to that part of their attack. While living in Phoenix during his ban he followed the team closely, anticipating his return; Gretzky—whose wife, Janet, allegedly placed bets with Tocchet (she wasn't charged)—had assured him that he'd save a place for him. "Obviously," said Tocchet last week, "I'm grateful and indebted to have that kind of friend." —*Sarah Kwak*

**BETTOR RETURNS** Tocchet got back to work last week.

# Faces in the Crowd

## Michael Sturns

FORT WORTH > Basketball

Sturns, a senior guard at Holy Family, scored career highs in consecutive wins, with 39 points against Chestnut Hill and a school-record 51 against New York Institute of Technology; he was named Eastern College Athletic Conference Division II player of the week. His 26.5 points per game lead the country.

## Allison Fisher

CHARLOTTE > Billiards

Fisher, 39, won her eighth Women's Professional Billiards Association championship. It was her 72nd tournament win since moving to the U.S. from England in 1995. She has won more titles than all her competitors combined and has been the world's top-ranked player in 11 of the last 12 years.

**HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO FACE**

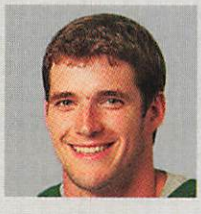
## Ashley Rape

POWERED BY TAKKLE

DALLAS > Soccer

Ashley, a senior forward at the Greenhill School, ended her high school career with 17 goals and 20 assists as she led the Hornets to the Southwest Preparatory Conference semifinals. A member of the under-17 national team in 2007, she signed to play for Duke.

TO SEE ASHLEY'S HIGHLIGHTS, GO TO Takkle.com/videofaces.



## Mike Devine

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. > Hockey

Devine, a senior goaltender at Dartmouth, made a career-high 54 saves as the Big Green upset then No. 5 UNH 5–3; he also had a win against BU and was named national player of the week by Inside College Hockey. A unanimous first-team All-Ivy selection as a junior, he is second in school history with 43 wins.

## Brandon Gleason

MANTORVILLE, MINN. > Track and Field

Gleason, a junior at Division III Hamline, finished seventh in the 3,000 meters at the all-divisions Iowa State Open 11 months after a car ran over his legs and fractured his right tibia. (A steel rod was inserted to stabilize the leg.) His time of 8:34.45 is the best in the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

## Laura Weinberg

BOCA RATON, FLA. > Soccer

Laura, a sophomore forward at St. Andrew's School, scored 24 goals and had six assists as the Scots went 13-3-2 and reached the regional semifinals. Last year, when St. Andrew's went 19-1-2 and won its first Class 3A title, she had 24 goals and 10 assists and was named state tournament MVP.

**NOMINATE NOW ON SI.COM**

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd or to submit a video Face to Takkle.com, go to **SI.com/faces.**

JEFF TOPPING/REUTERS (TOCCHET); FROM TOP: DAVOR PHOTOGRAPHY; LARRY BUSACCA; MARK HOUGH/GREENHILL SCHOOL; MARK WASHBURN; HAMLINE UNIVERSITY SPORTS INFORMATION; COURTESY OF THE WEINBERG FAMILY

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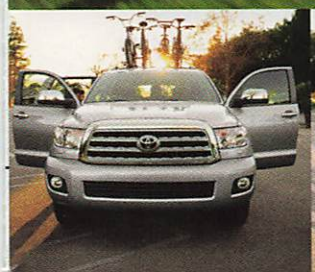

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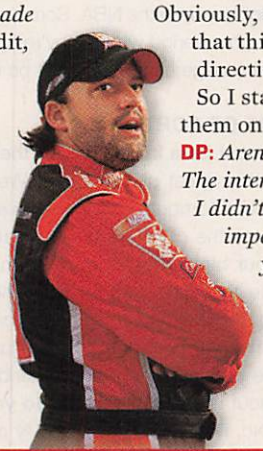
# Just My Type

## The Interview

**Tony Stewart**
NASCAR DRIVER

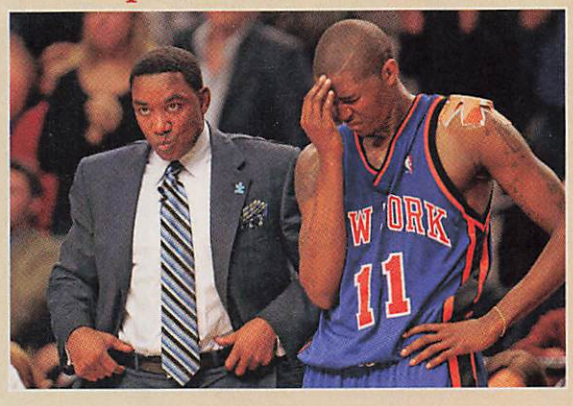
*Stewart will race in the Daytona 500 on Sunday.*

**Dan Patrick:** *Are you enjoying the fact that your long hair is upsetting some people?*
**Tony Stewart:** I love it. Just the fact that they keep raising such a big stink about it keeps making me want to grow it longer and longer—just to make them more upset. I've never seen any sport where a topic like this is actually a topic.
**DP:** *This may be sacrilegious to you, but if they remade* Smokey and the Bandit, *would you be the Bandit?*
**TS:** Oh, God, absolutely. Are you kidding me? I would stop everything I'm doing just to play that role.
**DP:** *If I said* Smokey and the Bandit *begins shooting this week or you drive in the Daytona 500. . . .*



**TS:** I'm going to shoot the movie with you.
**DP:** *I'm putting Burt Reynolds in there as Smokey, O.K.?*
**TS:** Yeah, absolutely. I think the only way this is really going to work, though, is if you play Buford T. Justice.
**DP:** *If I said you're going cross-country and you've got three guys in the backseat, who's going with you?*
**TS:** Well, I can promise you it wouldn't be three guys. I'd take three girls with me.
**DP:** *That's fair. Who are the ladies?*
**TS:** I would pick Halle Berry, Carmen Electra and probably Angelina Jolie.
**DP:** *You're looked at as that blue-collar workingman's driver from the Midwest. But you switched from Chevy to Toyota. Any grief from the fans about going with a foreign car?*
**TS:** Not so far. The thing that I like about Joe and J.D. [Gibbs] as car owners is that they are going to do whatever it takes for us to win championships. Obviously, they thought that this was the right direction for us. So I stand behind them on that.
**DP:** *Aren't you proud? The interview's over and I didn't ask you how important it is for you to win the Daytona 500.*
**TS:** That's why I actually like you.

## Caption You'll Never See



**AFTER CALLING** a timeout in Portland during the Knicks' recent eight-game losing streak, Isiah Thomas pulled aside Jamal Crawford and began whistling. Crawford later said, "I think it was *Over the Rainbow.* It was horrible."

## The List

### Suggestions for Spicing Up NBA All-Star Saturday

1 **BRICK OFF: BAD FREE THROWS CONTEST** Shaq, Ben Wallace *(right)* and others try to top each other at the stripe. Will 6 for 10 win it?

2 **12TH-MAN TRIATHLON** Events: towel-waving, butt-slapping, sucking up ("Keep shooting, Kobe!").

3 **FINE WHINE COMPETITION** Each contestant runs to ref to complain about a call. Creativity counts. Early favorites: Rasheed Wallace, Tim Duncan, Sam Cassell.

4 **SUIT 'N' SHOOT** Invitees wear their flashiest duds and compete in a shootout. Points are awarded for style. Judges: Don Cherry, Heidi Klum *(right).*

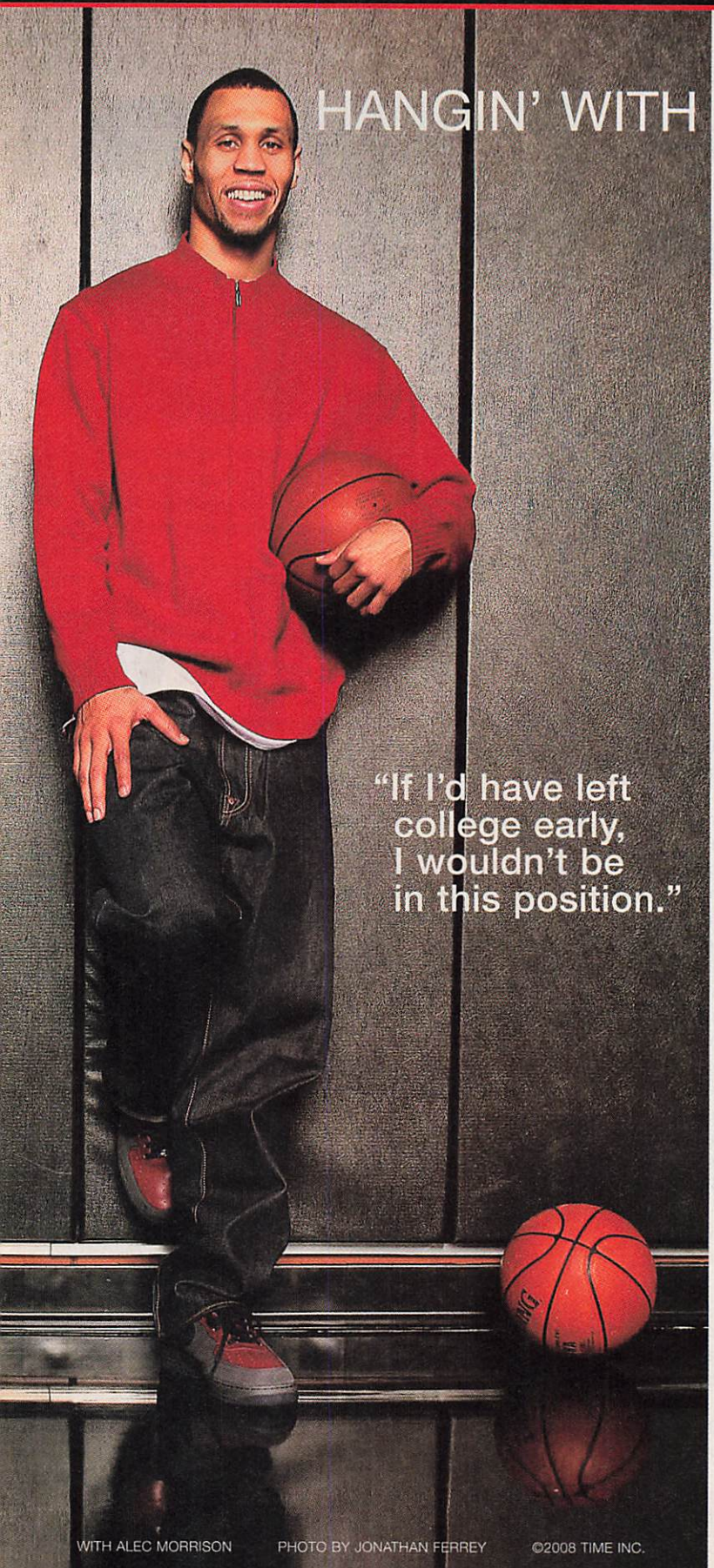
5 **POSSE AMERICAN IDOL** Wanna hang with KG? Let's hear you do Stevie Wonder's *For Once in My Life.*

## Gut Feeling of the Week

I WAS TALKING to Bob Knight on the radio last Friday and he surprised me by not giving a definitive *no* when I asked if he would ever coach again. The way he spoke, I got the feeling he may very well come back. If he does, though, I don't think Knight would return for a major-conference job. He told me he'd never enjoyed coaching more than when he was at Army in the 1960s. I think he'd have to be at a school where RPI doesn't matter but GPA does. Can't you imagine him prowling the sideline at a place like, say, Dartmouth? Or maybe Cornell—so he could keep all his red sweaters.

**THE FINE PRINT:** Phil Mickelson took an 11 on the 14th at Pebble. So Peter Ueberroth, who was in the foursome, got to say "You're away, Phil" four times in a row.

GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES (STEWART, TOP); TONY GUTIERREZ/AP (STEWART, BELOW); DON RYAN/AP (THOMAS); GARY DINEEN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (WALLACE); BRAD BARKET/GETTY IMAGES (KLUM); ILLUSTRATION BY KEITH WITMER. SPECIAL CONTRIBUTORS: BIFF POCOROBA, MANNY SANGUILLEN, BUTCH WYNEGAR




WITH ALEC MORRISON PHOTO BY JONATHAN FERREY ©2008 TIME INC.

# HANGIN' WITH BRANDON ROY

## PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS GUARD

BRANDON ROY DOESN'T have to tell you he loves his life. You can hear it in his voice, bright and effusive. The Portland Trail Blazers traded for Roy on draft day 2006, and he hasn't disappointed. The 2006–07 rookie of the year has helped steer the Blazers, the league's youngest team, into playoff position this season. On Sunday, he'll play in his first NBA All-Star game in New Orleans. But Roy, a Seattle native, is just as happy to be in the Northwest, his parents a three-hour drive away, his girlfriend, Tiana, and his son alongside him in Portland. "As a family guy, it was important that I was able to stay right at home," Roy says. "I was like a kid in the candy store when they made that trade for me."

### THE FAMILY GUY

**Your son, Brandon Jr., was born last year. What's the best and worst of being a dad?** Well, the worst part is when I have to travel, and I'm not able to be there every day. He's starting to walk, his teeth are coming in, so to not be there is hard for me, especially being a young dad and him being my first son. For me, there's nothing bad about when I'm with him. Every moment is great, even when I have to change his little dirty diaper. **Were you able to be there when he was born?** Yeah, I was right there for the delivery. Everybody said I did a good job. But it's a real experience *(laughs)*. **Tougher than a game situation?** *(laughs)* It's more like, if it's a game, I'm a guy sitting on the bench, keeping the team confident, just trying to do my best to motivate.

### THE OLD MAN

**Do teammates see you as prematurely old, now that you have a son?** Yeah, I'm the old guy now. I'm 23, but I did four years in college, and we're a very young team. **It's like you're a senior in college again.** That's exactly what it's like. Only then, I had three years to prepare for it. Now I'm just trying to be the leader but at the same time, learn for myself. **After high school, you thought about entering the NBA Draft. Are you now the poster boy for staying in school (University of Washington) for four years?** Yeah. I think so. Everybody's situation is different, but I think the four years in college helped prepare me to be ready right away in the NBA. Some guys come out early and they go through a period where they're trying to find themselves. If I'd have left college early, I wouldn't be in this position.

### PRINCE OF PORTLAND

**There must be a lot of love for the Blazers in Portland these days.** It's a great place to play. We don't have pro football or baseball to compete with. When we do well, we really do have the key to the city. **The team created an "iRoy" mp3 player with your highlights as part of an All-Star media push. Did you see that coming?** I'd heard nothing about it, and as I'm walking out of practice, someone gave me one. I took it home and I showed my mom, and she just started crying. The support the organization gives me, and the things my teammates said about me—I was thrilled. **So you have a bunch at home now?** No, I only have the one. My mom has it. **She's showing it off to her friends.** Yeah, she's on Cloud 10. *(laughs)* She tells everybody about it, then they bother me about getting one. She can't tell anybody else till I get a few more.

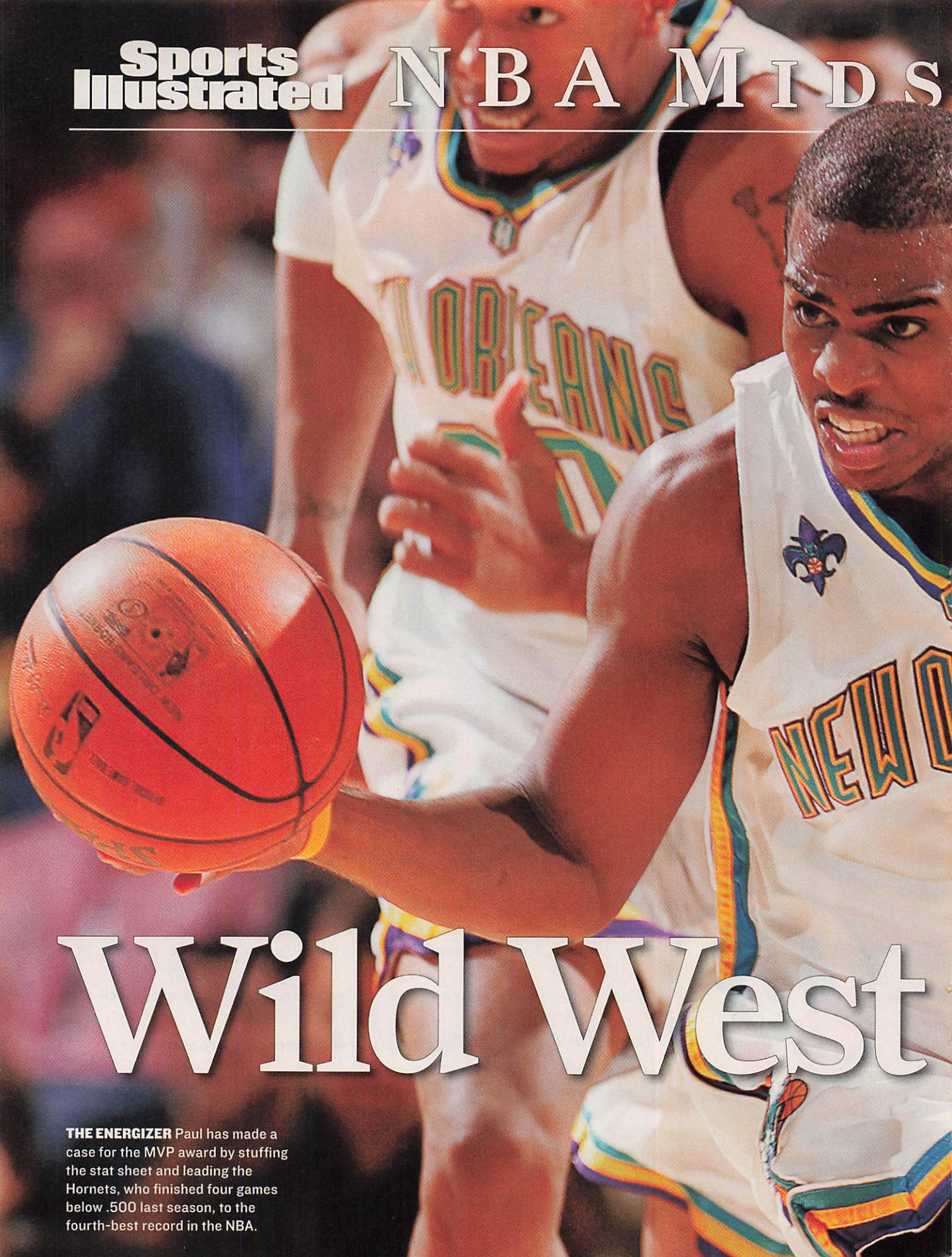
Yo hey, I'm Paul, the original Dollar Menunaire. I'll admit it. I'm kind of a risk taker. Last week, I threw in this red t-shirt with a load of whites. A sock came out pink, but no pain, no gain. So I like a safe bet sometimes to, ya know, keep my balance. As luck would have it, there's the Dollar Menu. It's pretty much loaded with **choice choices.** There's no wrong answer in the whole bunch. So it keeps my yin balanced with my yang. So to speak.

Dollar Menu

i'm lovin' it.

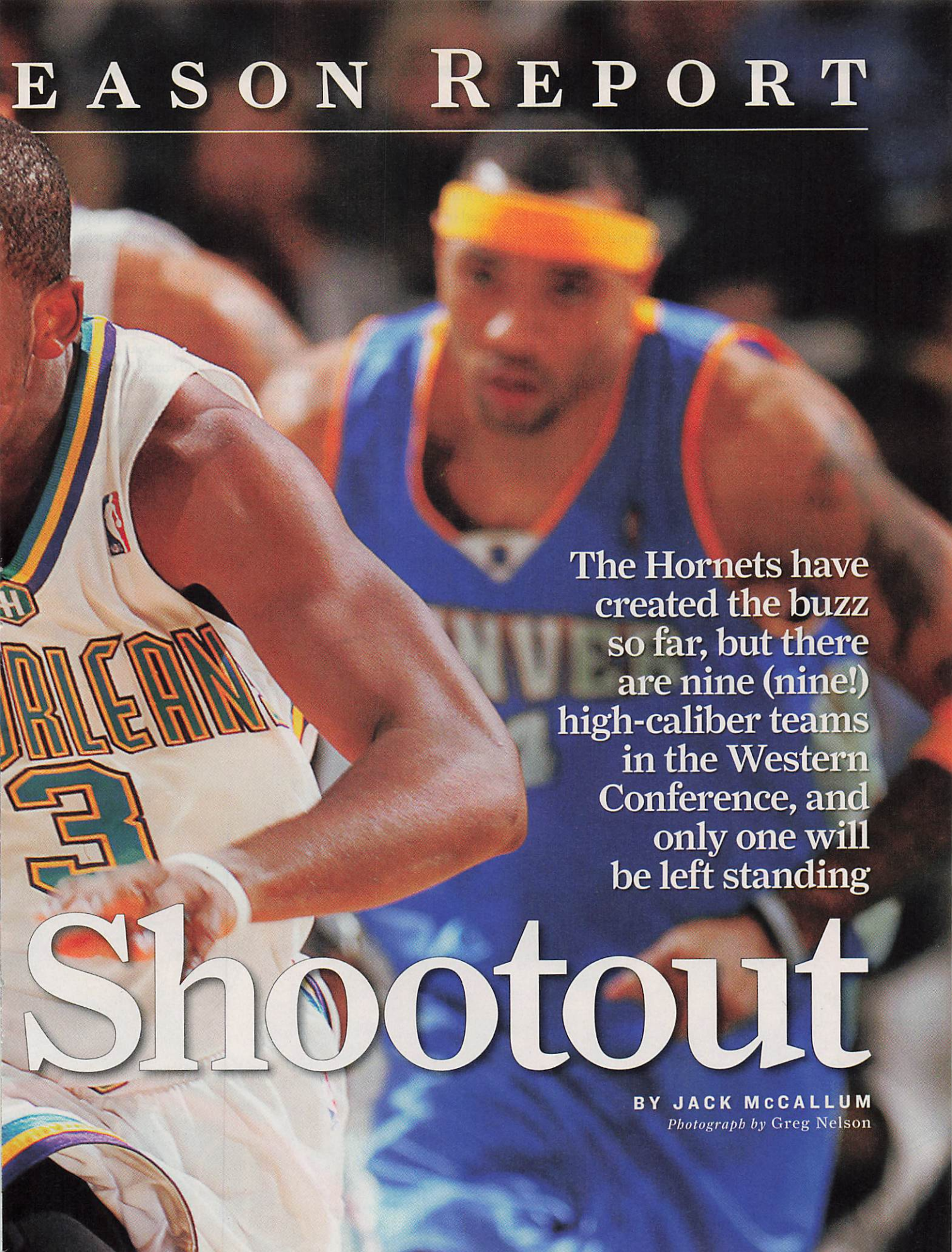
At participating McDonald's. ©2008 McDonald's

Sports Illustrated NBA MIDS



# Wild West

**THE ENERGIZER** Paul has made a case for the MVP award by stuffing the stat sheet and leading the Hornets, who finished four games below .500 last season, to the fourth-best record in the NBA.



The Hornets have created the buzz so far, but there are nine (nine!) high-caliber teams in the Western Conference, and only one will be left standing

# Shootout

BY JACK McCALLUM

*Photograph by* Greg Nelson

SHORTLY AFTER Chris Paul had finished torching his role model and Western Conference rival Steve Nash for the third time this season, the Hornets' point guard offered a humble analysis of New Orleans's 132–130 double-overtime victory over the Phoenix Suns on Feb. 6. "Coach finally made the right call and gave Peja [Stojakovic] the last shot instead of me," said Paul. It was indeed Stojakovic's buzzer-beating 22-footer that won the game, but it was Paul's groaning stat line (42 points, five rebounds, nine assists, eight steals and only one turnover in 50 minutes) that was commanding most of the attention in the cramped visitors' locker room at US Airways Center.

So it was left to teammates Bobby Jackson and Jannero Pargo, the other members of the three-guard offense that played all 10 overtime minutes, to analyze the box score a different way.

"Hey, Kobe," said Jackson, cupping his mouth and yelling at Paul. "You get enough shots?" Paul had fired up a season-high 33.

"Let me see that," said Pargo, looking at the stat sheet. "Hey, Chris Bryant over here. Everybody come talk to Chris Bryant."

Paul smiled and waved his hand in a just-ignore-them gesture. From across the crowded room, Stojakovic looked on with amusement. "They like to give it to Chris a little bit," he said. "We all give it to each other a little bit."

More often, though, the Hornets have been giving it to other teams—especially the Suns, whom they've beaten three times this season with Paul averaging 30.3 points, 9.7 assists, 4.3 steals and, most improbably, 1.0 turnovers. And as All-Star weekend begins in New Orleans on Friday, there seems to be no happier team than the Hornets, who will be represented by Paul, fifth-year power forward David West and coach Byron Scott. The positive frame of mind has nothing to do, presumably, with the *laissez les bon temps rouler* atmosphere of the Big Easy and everything to do with the Hornets' surprisingly elevated position: second-best in the more-formidable-than-ever

**SWEET 16** Since leaving the also-ran Grizzlies, Gasol has provided 19.5 points and 8.8 boards per game for already potent L.A.

FERNANDO MEDINA/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

Western Conference with a 34–15 record through Sunday.

"It's like the Hornets snuck up on people," says Boston Celtics guard Eddie House. "That's what happens in the league. You don't respect somebody, and before you know it, you're getting your ass kicked."

Ass-kickings, though, can come from almost anywhere in the West, which at week's end had an astounding nine teams with winning percentages better than .600 and a first-through-10th spread of only 7½ games. Every day, it seems, a new contender springs up like one of those grinning targets in a Whac-a-Mole game. "We talk about it all the time," says New Orleans swingman Morris Peterson, "how one day you can be in first place, lose one game and you'll be in sixth or seventh."

From the safety of LeBron Land, Cleveland Cavaliers coach Mike Brown can afford to chuckle. "You could wind up four, five, six games over .500 and be sitting in 11th place and out of the playoffs," says Brown. "I look forward to sitting back and watching them battle it out."

**Every day, it seems, a new contender springs up like one of those grinning WHAC-A-MOLE targets.**

THE THING IS, the West was already good before its teams—two in particular this month—decided to get even better. The Los Angeles Lakers' landing power forward Pau Gasol from the Memphis Grizzlies (who are apparently in full fire-sale mode) on Feb. 1 and the Suns' stunning acquisition of center Shaquille O'Neal *(sidebar)* on Feb. 6 made the inactivity of some needy teams in the East seem downright lame by comparison. "You mean to tell me the #@%$# Chicago Bulls couldn't find a way to get Gasol?" says one exasperated Western Conference assistant coach who asked for anonymity. "[The Grizzlies] had to send him to a team that already has Kobe Bryant? Are you frickin' kidding me?"

No joke. Neither is this: The most influential player in the NBA over the

ANDREW D. BERNSTEIN/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

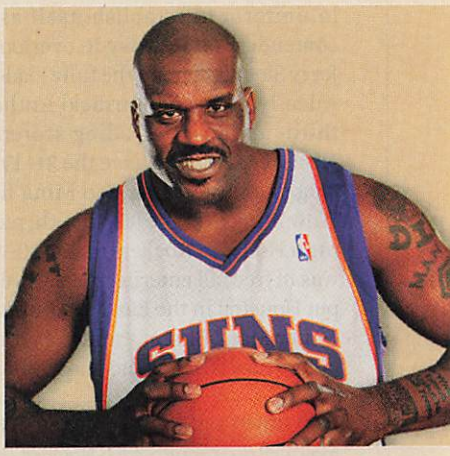
# The Suns' Big Hunch

## With its plodding new pickup in surprisingly good shape, fast-breaking Phoenix believes that it can complete its run for a title

THE PHRASES you've been hearing from the Suns after their trade for Shaquille O'Neal are *protecting the basket, strengthening the half-court offense* and *providing more second-chance points.* But before those theoretical enhancements can become realities in Phoenix, something much more, well, corporeal must show improvement.

Shaq's butt.

"He has weakness in his gluteus muscles," says Suns trainer Aaron Nelson, who began his work in earnest on Sunday afternoon, when O'Neal returned from Miami to officially begin his tenure as the Big Sunshine. O'Neal also has, according to Nelson, significant tightness in his hips and ankles. These conditions will be addressed by an intense program of manual therapy and exercise, which got into high gear on Monday morning.



**HEAT EXHAUSTION** O'Neal seems rejuvenated after getting out of Miami.

All of which is *good* news, according to Phoenix officials. The medical issues that forced the 7′ 1″ O'Neal to miss 16 games this season were not, they say, precipitated by structural abnormalities, widespread tendinitis or lingering ramifications from surgeries to his right big toe (a bone spur removed in 2002) and left knee (a scope in 2006). Rather, the tight and weak muscles have prevented him from moving freely. "We can get those areas firing," says Nelson. "It's happened with other players, and we've usually gotten them back."

The Suns were so pleased with what they saw in their initial exam last Thursday—Thomas Carter, the team orthopedist, said that O'Neal, who turns 36 on March 6, weighed 321 pounds and had only 11% body fat—that on Monday they anticipated that O'Neal would be in uniform this week. The most likely scenario is that he will start against the Mavericks at US Airways Arena on Thursday.

"I have no idea about minutes," says coach Mike D'Antoni. "We're just going to wait and see how he feels."

The trade, which sent four-time All-Star forward Shawn Marion and reserve point guard Marcus Banks to Miami, has already been dissected and, from the Phoenix perspective, dissed. In an ESPN.com poll, 71% of respondents said that the Suns had been fleeced because O'Neal's days as an elite player are over. Then there's the strange merging—with just two months left in the season—of a get-up-and-go track team and a lumbering leviathan. But D'Antoni swears that won't be a problem and cites the 1980s Lakers to bolster his point.

"Do you think Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar] joined Magic [Johnson] and those guys on the fast break?" D'Antoni says. "But they made it work, didn't they?"

Abdul-Jabbar was 40 and 41 years old when the Lakers won back-to-back titles in 1987 and '88. He was third on the team in scoring (17.5 points per game) the first year and fourth (14.6) the second. Of course, he was also a workout fanatic who missed only 35 regular-season games over his last 11 seasons. Shaq, who was averaging 14.2 points with the Heat, missed 74 over his last three complete seasons.

So although the attention will focus on what Shaq does between the lines, what he does behind the training-room doors will determine whether the trade was a grand success or a spectacular failure. "The athlete, in this case Shaq, is motivated by how much better he feels and how much closer he is to being a hundred percent," says Nelson of the rehab regimen. "But that doesn't mean it isn't painful and exhausting. It's lots of hard work." Shaq's heart, and his butt, will be on trial. —J.M.

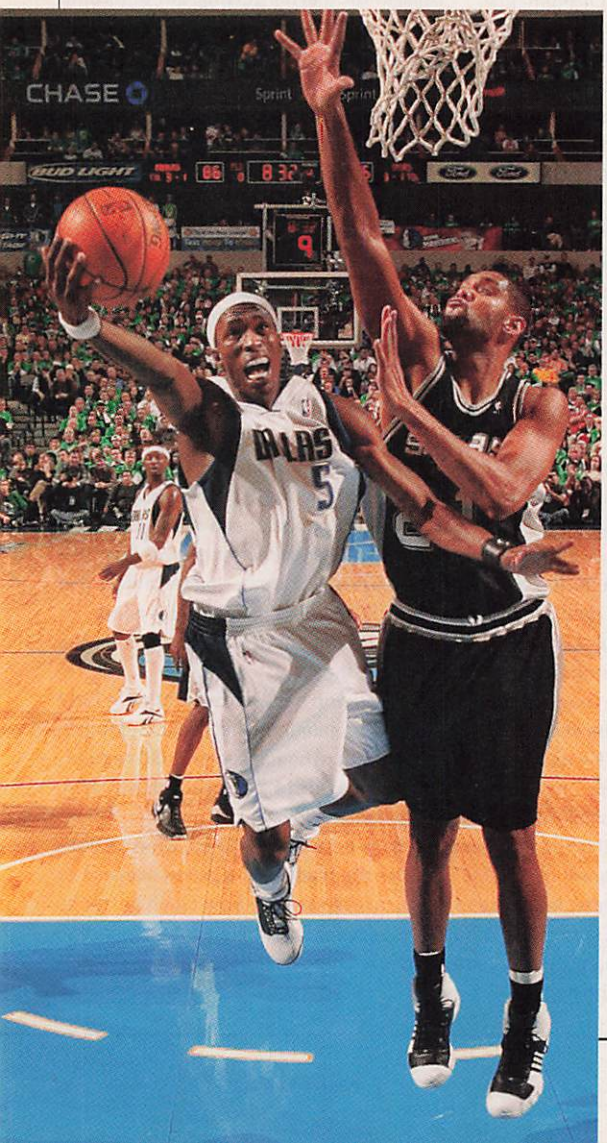
last six weeks might well be perimeter sharpshooter Kyle Korver. As soon as the 6' 7" Ashton Kutcher look-alike went to Utah from Philadelphia in a Dec. 29 trade, the Jazz took off; through Sunday it had won 17 of its 20 games with Korver in uniform to establish itself as a solid contender. Yet it's easy to overlook coach Jerry Sloan's team in the fully loaded West. Allen Iverson and Carmelo Anthony, the third- and fourth-leading scorers in the NBA, respectively, have the 31–19 Denver Nuggets in the hunt. Yao Ming has been Wow Ming over the last month, reenergizing a Houston Rockets team (30–20) that was in free fall entering the new year. "You put Houston in the East," says Miami Heat center Mark Blount, "and they'd be a two or three seed." Too much has been made of Golden State's free-agent signing of Chris Webber, who turns 35 on March 1, but the Warriors (30–20) were a dangerous team even before they landed veteran insurance for their frontcourt.

Although the Celtics and the Detroit Pistons might demur, any of those second-tier Western teams would be a threat to win the East, never mind the powers at the top of the conference. Whether or not you like the Shaq deal, only a fool would count out Phoenix. The thought that Bryant will cede some of the offensive responsibility to Gasol in L.A. and come into the postseason rested is frightening—in their four games together through Sunday, Bryant has averaged 21.5 points and Gasol 19.5.

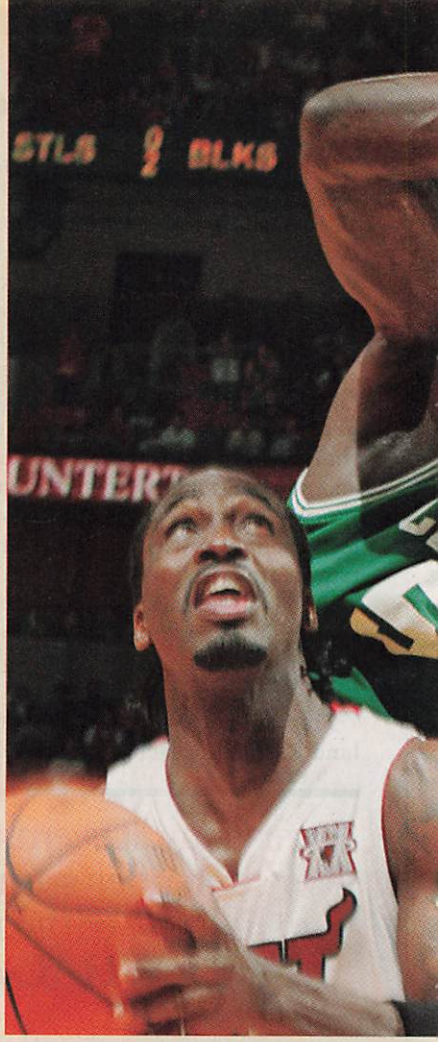
The Dallas Mavericks (34–16) are good and trying to upgrade; they were identified by several sources as bridesmaids in the Shaq deal and were still actively pursuing New Jersey Nets point guard Jason Kidd at week's end *(page 39)*. Even Kidd-less, the Mavs, who had the best record in the league last season, are formidable. "Dallas has really gotten better," says Philadelphia 76ers guard Willie Green, "even though it doesn't seem like it."

One team that hasn't improved is the San Antonio Spurs, but then, they *are* the defending champs. The Spurs were 32–17 at week's end and looking up at the Suns, Hornets, Mavs and Lakers. San Antonio can't seem to keep its Big Three of Tim Duncan, Tony Parker and Manu Ginóbili on the floor together—collectively, they've missed 19 games—and its acquisition of backup point guard Damon Stoudamire off the waiver wire paled in comparison with the moves made by L.A. and Phoenix. But if Parker comes back after the All-Star Game recovered from a left-heel injury, the Spurs will be dangerous in the spring. As Sixers forward Reggie Evans puts it, "The Spurs are one of a kind."

The Portland Trail Blazers were the fave flavor of the first half of the season; despite going 6–9 in their last 15 games, they will still battle for the eighth playoff spot if All-Star guard Brandon Roy stays healthy. Even if Portland doesn't make the postseason, the transformation from Jail Blazers to Hail Blazers—the Rose Garden is once again filled almost to capacity nightly—has been one of the feel-good stories of the year. And next season Greg Oden takes the court.



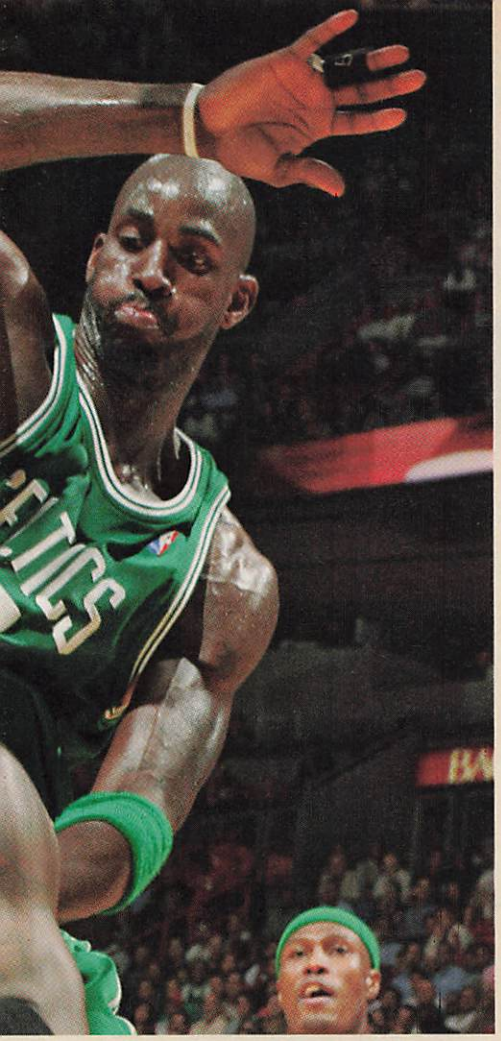

**AND DON'T FORGET** The path to the Finals may well go through Josh Howard (left) and the Mavs or Tim Duncan and the Spurs.




GREG NELSON

IN TERMS of revival, though, no one can match the story in New Orleans, where the vibe seems even more upbeat in comparison with the stagnant atmosphere in San Antonio, Dallas and, until the arrival of the Big Standup, Phoenix. The elite teams in those cities have labored under something unfamiliar to the Hornets' franchise: the weight of expectations. "Everybody keeps telling me how unhappy we are, so we keep telling ourselves the same thing," says Suns coach Mike D'Antoni, whose club was four games off last year's pace through 50 games. "Truthfully, we're not that unhappy. But we're not as happy as New Orleans."

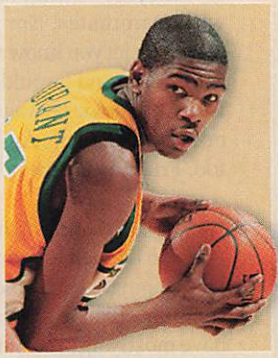
Part of the challenge for the Hornets, who finished 39–43 and out of the playoffs last season, is to believe that they



# Honor Roll

SI's midseason awards have a decidedly Boston flavor *By Ian Thomsen*

**MVP: KEVIN GARNETT**, *Celtics (left)*
He is the all-around leader of the league's dominant team, which was a laughingstock last year.
**Rookie of the Year: KEVIN DURANT**, *Sonics (right)*
No one in his class comes close to matching his production, thanks to his substantial role in rebuilding Seattle.
**Defensive Player of the Year: KEVIN GARNETT**, *Celtics*
He's turned one of the league's worst defensive teams into its best.
**Most Improved Player: DWIGHT HOWARD**, *Magic (bottom right)*
The hardest jump for a player is the one from very good to great, and Howard has made it.
**Sixth Man: MANU GINÓBILI**, *Spurs*
Shame on the Western coaches for not voting him an All-Star.
**Coach of the Year: DOC RIVERS**, *Celtics*
He's persuaded three headliners to play together—under the direction of a second-year point guard.
**Executive of the Year: DANNY AINGE**, *Celtics*
His summer blockbuster set the trend for ambitious moves (see: the Lakers and the Suns).



**FIRST-TEAM ALL-NBA**
F **KEVIN GARNETT**, *Celtics*
F **LEBRON JAMES**, *Cavaliers*
C **DWIGHT HOWARD**, *Magic*
G **KOBE BRYANT**, *Lakers*
G **STEVE NASH**, *Suns*

**FIRST-TEAM ALL-DEFENSIVE**
F **KEVIN GARNETT**, *Celtics*
F **BRUCE BOWEN**, *Spurs*
C **MARCUS CAMBY**, *Nuggets*
G **KOBE BRYANT**, *Lakers*
G **CHRIS PAUL**, *Hornets*

HEINZ KLUETMEIER (GARNETT); DAVID LIAM KYLE/NBAE/GETTY IMAGES (DURANT); JOHN BIEVER (HOWARD)

truly belong. New Orleans has adopted a we're-not-all-that-surprised attitude about its rise, but really, the players are a little surprised. "CP [Chris Paul] and I always talked about closing the gap with the best teams in the West," says West.

> "You put Houston in the East," says Miami center Blount, "and they'd be a **TWO OR THREE SEED.**"

"We knew if we could stay healthy and stay together, we could do it, and it looks like we've done it. Just maybe a little quicker than we thought."

Quicker because they were a team of question marks at the beginning of the season. West and center Tyson Chandler, both still developing, still learning, were never considered surefire stars. No one knew if small forward Stojakovic could recover his elite-player status after missing 96 games in the past three seasons, including all but 13 last year after back surgery. And was Scott—who never received much credit for leading the Nets to back-to-back Finals in 2002 and '03, getting fired for his efforts after feuding with Kidd—the one to mastermind this daunting job in the wild West? "Patched together" is the way Orlando Magic executive Pat Williams describes the Hornets.

In one area, though, there was no question mark—point guard. Paul, the 2006 Rookie of the Year, gets into the lane almost at will with a herky-jerky change-of-pace dribble and confounds defenders by darting in front of them once he gets a step. He's no Nash as a pure shooter (he was hitting 34.0% of his threes through Sunday compared with Nash's 47.0%), but he's better on the run and has a deadly teardrop bank shot, particularly from the right side. "It all begins with CP," says Stojakovic, "and everybody on our team knows it."

Paul's numbers (20.4 points, 10.9 assists, 2.57 steals) only begin to suggest his importance. What he's doing in New Orleans is analogous to what Nash did in Phoenix in 2004–05, when he won the first of two straight MVPs: lift a downtrodden team to elite status. New York Knicks coach Isiah Thomas paid Paul, 22, the ultimate compliment earlier this season, telling Hornets assistant Darrell Walker, an old Pistons teammate, "I don't know whether I was that good when I was his age."

"Chris has his team near the top in the toughest division [the Southwest]," says Chandler. "He's the best player on our team. He's the floor general, making everyone better. He could get 25 points a night guaranteed, but he's sacrificing for the team. Man, I don't know what an MVP is if it isn't that guy." Peterson adds that the 6-foot Paul

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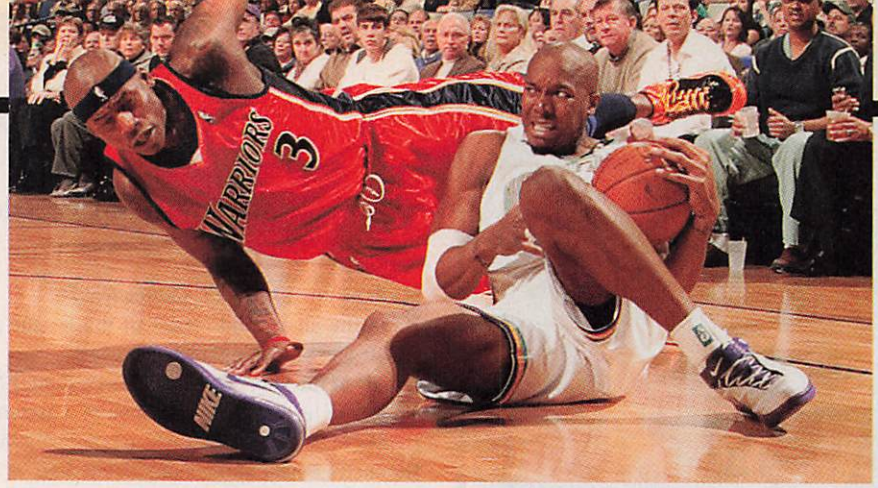
is one of the team's best defenders, "and that sets a trickle-down tone."

Plus, Paul has become a little nasty. The one knock against him was that he was too nice, too willing to ingratiate himself with teammates. Not anymore. "CP will definitely let you know what he's thinking," says West, "and I wouldn't want it any other way. As a rookie he was a little tentative, but now he speaks up. And he takes criticism too. From me anyway."

INDEED, PAUL and West sometimes can be seen hugging one minute, then sniping at each other the next. Through such, uh, creative discussions, they seem to have mostly figured out when West should assume his position in the lane and when he should clear out to open things up for Paul. The 6' 9" West is an old school player in that he eschews the three-point line and likes to play with his back to the basket. He has a smorgasbord of inside moves but can also step back and hit a jumper, his game a rougher version of that of Alex English, the NBA's 11th alltime leading scorer. "My goal is to be a threat from everywhere inside the three-point line," says West, who was averaging 19.6 points and 9.2 rebounds through Sunday. "I knew I needed to be dangerous in a couple of different ways to make it in this league." Few thought, though, that he'd make it well enough to be an All-Star.



**JUST ADD SEASONING** The emergence of West, a first-time All-Star, has given New Orleans a hard-nosed threat in the post.

Stojakovic was an All-Star in 2001, '02 and '03 with the Sacramento Kings. He may never be able to achieve that status again, but he seems happy and healthy—"I have good days and bad days," says Stojakovic (16.0 points, 46.6% from three-point range), "but more good than bad"—and content to roam in the wide-open spaces created by Paul's creativity and West's post-ups. In Sacramento, Stojakovic was always told that he needed to expand his game, play with his back to the basket or get better at creating his own shot. There's little need for him to do any of that in New Orleans.

# Playoff Predictions, Take 2

Some names have changed from SI's preseason picks, but the last team standing remains the same

## EAST

### FIRST ROUND

**No. 1 CELTICS over No. 8 PACERS** Overachieving Indiana provides a good test for Boston.

**No. 2 PISTONS over No. 7 BULLS** Detroit sets the tone for its playoff run with a series sweep.

**No. 3 CAVALIERS over No. 6 WIZARDS** The return of a healthy Gilbert Arenas will help force the James Gang to seven games.

**No. 4 MAGIC over No. 5 RAPTORS** In a tight matchup, Dwight Howard proves the decisive star.

### SECOND ROUND

**CELTICS over MAGIC** Boston in six as Kevin Garnett flourishes in the high post.

**PISTONS over CAVALIERS** Detroit clamps down on LeBron, avenging last year's playoff loss.

### CONFERENCE FINALS

**PISTONS over CELTICS** Detroit, peaking at the right time, carries the individual matchups.

## WEST

### FIRST ROUND

**No. 1 MAVERICKS over No. 8 ROCKETS** Dallas uses this series to play its way into championship form.

**No. 7 NUGGETS over No. 2 JAZZ** Denver takes down Utah in a breakneck seven games.

**No. 3 LAKERS over No. 6 HORNETS** Kobe Bryant officially declares his candidacy for ring number four.

**No. 4 SUNS over No. 5 SPURS** San Antonio slows the tempo, but Shaq helps Phoenix win one of the great opening-round series of the last 20 years.

### SECOND ROUND

**MAVERICKS over SUNS** After two playoff disappointments, Dallas has the resilience to outlast Phoenix.

**LAKERS over NUGGETS** L.A.'s defense and half-court execution neutralize Denver's high-scoring attack.

### CONFERENCE FINALS

**MAVERICKS over LAKERS** Andrew Bynum and Pau Gasol come up short as Dallas's experience wins out.

### NBA FINALS

**MAVERICKS OVER PISTONS** The West is still best: Dirk Nowitzki *(above)* becomes the first European player to lead a team to an NBA championship. —I.T.

GREG NELSON (2)

What there is absolute need for is Chandler's energetic defense. Only four teams (Boston, Detroit, San Antonio and Houston) were surrendering fewer points than the Hornets at week's end, and New Orleans had outscored all of them. A major reason for the tougher D (opponents were down to 94.6 points per game from 97.1 last season) is that the Hornets are enjoying it more. "A lot of times you get stats because you're not playing good team

**Only four teams surrender FEWER POINTS than the Hornets, and they outscore all of them.**

defense," says the 7' 1" Chandler, who was averaging 1.02 blocks through Sunday after averaging 1.77 last season. "I'm all over the floor, but I'm no longer going after every shot."

Chandler is a rarity, a high draft pick (selected second by Chicago in 2001) who was treasured almost exclusively because of his defense. "I understood from the beginning that my defense got me here," he says. As a bonus, however, Chandler and Paul have been clicking on pick-and-roll lobs. Chandler is not as lethal a finisher as the Suns' Amaré Stoudemire or the Magic's Dwight Howard, but his ability to lurk when Paul begins to penetrate, then crash when Paul gets doubled, has added a dimension to the Hornets' attack. "I don't think you've seen my best offense yet," says Chandler. "Right now I'm a 12–12 guy [12.2 points and 12.3 rebounds], but I could get 18 points a game down the road. There's so many things I have to learn—the midrange jumper, for example. But right now I hope I'm giving what this team needs."

Deftly moving all the pieces is Scott. This is *his* team in a way that the Nets (who had strong personalities such as Kidd, Kenyon Martin and Richard Jefferson on the floor and a shrewd and well-respected NBA hand in the front office in president Rod Thorn) never were. Scott is the only coach for whom Paul has ever played. They are simpatico in the same way that Nash and D'Antoni and Parker and Gregg Popovich are simpatico. Scott and Paul often show up early at the Hornets' Alario Center practice facility in suburban Westwego to lift weights, Scott as dedicated an iron-tosser as any player. "B looks like he's training to be Mr. America," says assistant coach Walker. "I kid him that he's on the juice, but it's all hard work."

Scott, who earned three rings with the Showtime Lakers in the '80s, knows what it takes to win a championship and that the Hornets are still lacking playoff experience. But these days he deals in reality, not false modesty.

"San Antonio, Phoenix and Dallas," Scott said recently, "are still the three best teams in the West."

And fourth best?

"You're standing in front of their coach right now," he said with a sly smile. "It's tough out here in the West, but we don't plan on going anywhere." □

FROM TOP: JOHN BIEVER; JOHN W. MCDONOUGH; MANNY MILLAN

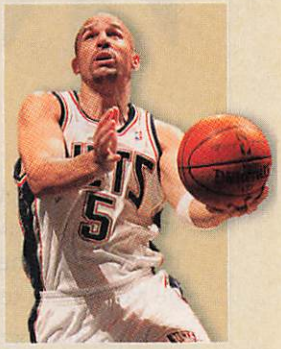
# Second-Half Storylines

The chemistry of the new-look Suns will draw plenty of interest, but here are three other situations to keep an eye on

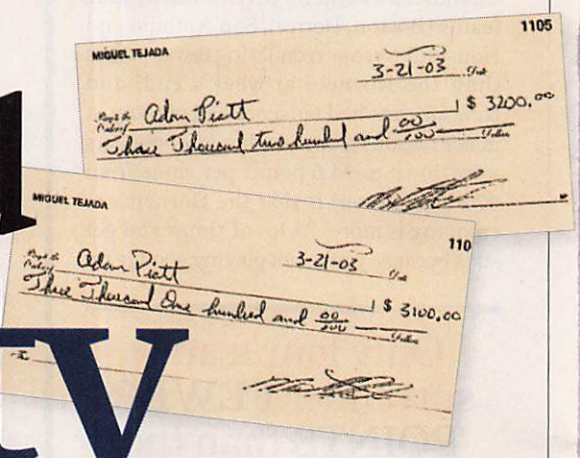
**CAN THE CELTICS BUILD ON THEIR SCORCHING START?** The key for Boston won't be to maintain its level of play from the first half but to improve it. The Celtics can hope for continued growth from young starters Rajon Rondo (point guard) and Kendrick Perkins (center), but more significant would be the acquisition of a veteran backup for Rondo. The biggest issue, however, will be the evolving relationship among Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce *(right)* and Ray Allen, the last of whom has struggled to find a consistent shooting rhythm in his role as a secondary option. Can these three play at a higher level as a group than they did during the team's first nine weeks, when it went 29–3? If not, then a championship is beyond them this year.

**WILL KOBE BRYANT FIND HAPPINESS THIS SPRING?** His outlook improved when the Lakers heisted power forward Pau Gasol from the Grizzlies. L.A. has gone from a one-man operation to a contender with scoring options at every position as well as an intriguing bench, but the club must survive the month ahead while awaiting the returns of starting center Andrew Bynum (left knee injury) and reserve forward Trevor Ariza (broken right foot) and integrating Gasol, who should feel liberated from the burden of carrying a losing team. It will be fascinating to watch Bryant *(right)* operate in the company of star talent again—though his fellow Lakers are probably a year away from being mature enough to reach the Finals.

**WILL JASON KIDD BE TRADED?** The Nets are unwilling to merely dump Kidd's salary for expiring contracts; they want young talent for their All-Star point guard. A year ago New Jersey investigated trading Kidd *(right)* and wings Vince Carter and Richard Jefferson; with the team in shambles now, it will again be open to moving any one of the three before the Feb. 21 trade deadline. The clubs who most covet Kidd—the Mavericks and the Cavaliers—have to get a third team involved to swing a deal, which complicates matters. Cleveland has thus far been unable to consummate a deal for Kidd or for the Kings' Mike Bibby, but the Cavs can also look for a playmaker in Philadelphia, where the 76ers would move Andre Miller for cap space. —I.T.



# Homeland Security



**There is a star under a steroids-related FBI investigation and it's not Roger Clemens. It's Miguel Tejada, who nonetheless remains an untainted hero in his native Dominican Republic**

**BY MELISSA SEGURA**

*Photographs by* Victor Baldizon

THE FORECAST called for rain in Santiago, but the dark, heavy clouds were stalled on the horizon, allowing sunshine to illuminate the diamond at Estadio Cibao. It was Jan. 31, two days before Miguel Tejada was to lead the Aguilas, his Dominican winter-league team, against the Yanquis of Mexico in the opening game of Latin America's biggest baseball event, the Caribbean Series. The 31-year-old Houston Astros shortstop, four times an All-Star with the Oakland A's and the Baltimore Orioles, bounded up the dugout steps, still tucking in his yellow practice jersey as he ran to join teammates. After batting practice, he soft-tossed with a team assistant and then headed for the infield. When he wasn't taking grounders, Tejada swung an imaginary bat at an imaginary ball, as a third-grader might.

The lightness of his step, the ease of his smile, however, masked a grimmer picture. On Jan. 15 Tejada learned that federal authorities would be investigating whether he had lied when he told U.S. congressional aides in August 2005 that he never took steroids or any other performance-enhancing drugs. If charged with and convicted of perjury, he could face up to five years in jail. What's more, just hours after hearing of the investigation, he received word that his older brother Freddy had died in a motorcycle accident.

But here at Estadio Cibao his demeanor was undeniably upbeat. He nodded to stadium workers who called his name and waved to reporters before he spied New York Yankees first base coach Tony Peña stepping onto the field. Peña, a five-time All-Star catcher during his 18-year major league career and idol to many young Dominican players, walked over and grabbed Tejada firmly by both arms, then whispered in the shortstop's right ear: "Don't let anybody hurt you. There are a lot of people after you."

"Tony," Tejada whispered back in Spanish, "my heart is clean."

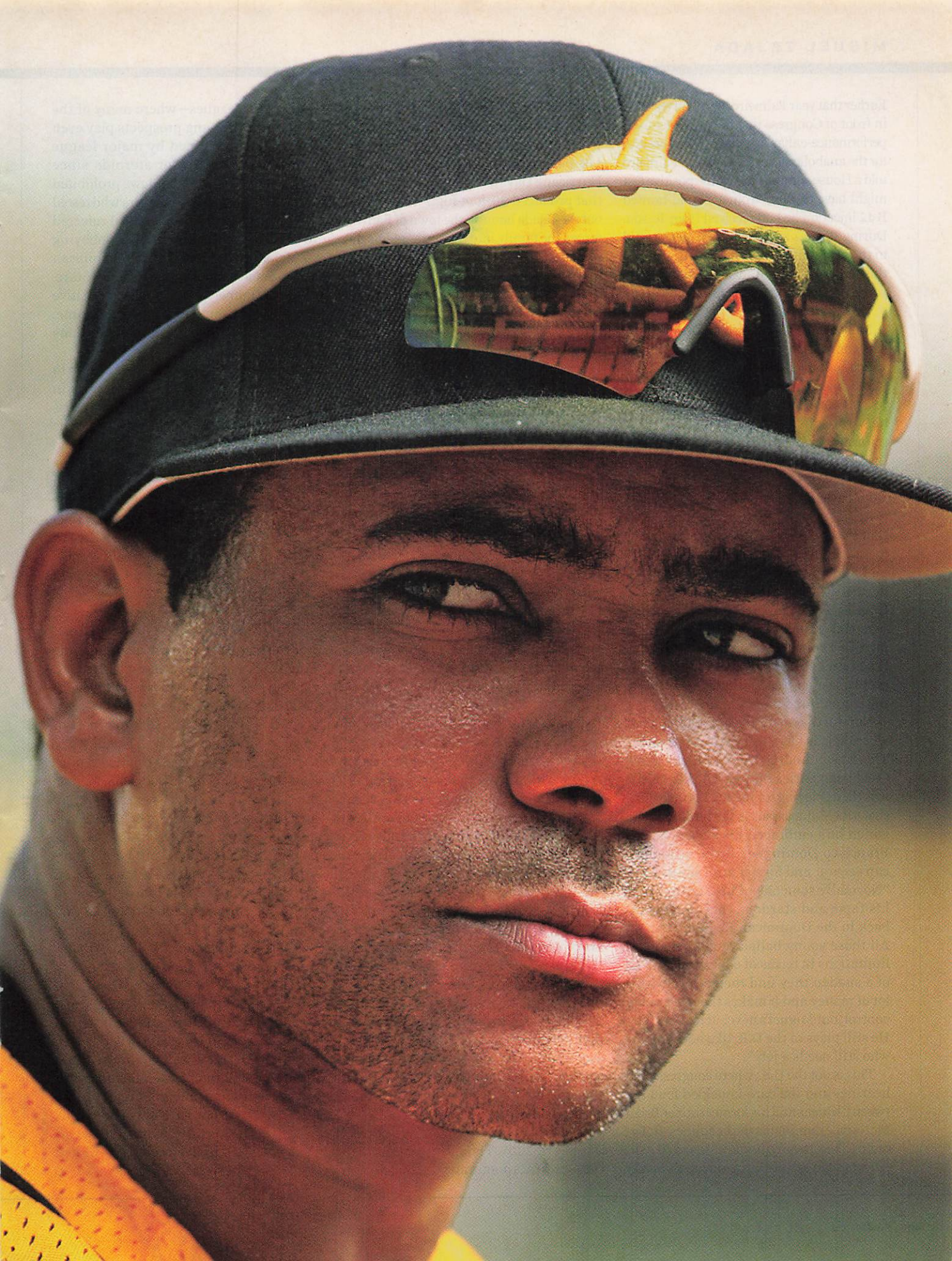
"I know you," Peña said, still holding him tightly.

"My heart is clean," repeated Tejada.

WHILE ROGER CLEMENS, Chuck Knoblauch and Andy Pettitte gave depositions last week to a House committee investigating steroid use in baseball, Miguel Tejada took infield and received a key to the city of Santiago. Tejada, however, remained very much on the minds of the House members—and was in greater legal peril at the time than any of the players who were scheduled to testify at Wednesday's hearings.

On Aug. 26, 2005, Tejada, accompanied by his lawyer and an interpreter, was interviewed by congressional aides at a Baltimore hotel as part of a perjury investigation of his former Orioles teammate Rafael Palmeiro.

**BACKGROUND CHECK** Tejada made history at the Caribbean Series (inset), but a paper trail has put his reputation at risk.



Earlier that year Palmeiro, who had testified in front of Congress that he had never used performance-enhancing drugs, tested positive for the anabolic steroid Stanozolol. Palmeiro told a House committee that the positive test might have resulted from a steroid-tainted B-12 injection he had received from Tejada. During Tejada's hotel interview, an aide said to the shortstop, "You, I believe, testified to this earlier, but I just want to make sure, have you ever taken a steroid before?"

"No," Tejada replied.

More than two years later that statement was contradicted in the Mitchell Report, which contained 38 references to Tejada by name, including copies of two checks—for $3,100 and $3,200—that he wrote to former A's teammate Adam Piatt in March 2003. In the report Piatt, who retired from baseball in '04, told Mitchell's investigators that the checks were payment for Deca-Durbalin and human-growth hormone that he had obtained from Kirk Radomski, the personal trainer and former New York Mets clubhouse attendant. (Last week Radomski received five years probation after pleading guilty to distributing steroids and money laundering.)

None of that mattered at Estadio Cibao, where Tejada has spent the last 14 winters. The fans pounding thundersticks at the Caribbean Series only cared that Tejada was there, playing for them. "The one thing that sets Miguel apart is the humility with which he's embraced his success," says Francisco Dominguez Brito, a Dominican senator and former attorney general. "Normally someone of his stature, with his fame and stardom, they don't come back to the Dominican Republic to play. All those young ballplayers have a lot of limitations in terms of education, and all of a sudden they find themselves with a lot of money and it makes them act out of control, but Miguel's never acted that way. He still plays in the D.R. like he's a rookie who still needs a job."

This is not the U.S., where congressional hearings and the bare-knuckled feud between Clemens and his former trainer Brian McNamee dominates the headlines. In Estadio Cibao, the myths die harder and ballplayers such as Tejada are unconditionally adored. The fans know the hardship Tejada endured growing up in the neighborhood whose very name sums up its challenges: Los Barrancones (the Obstacles). In 1979 Hurricane David, with its 150-mph winds that produced 30-foot-high waves, wiped out the Tejada home in the town of Baní and forced the family into the slums of Los Barrancones. That's the same dirt-poor barrio to which Tejada returns every off-season to deliver food. In 2004 he donated the money to build a 3,000-seat stadium in Baní. And one day after he buried his brother, Tejada was on the field for the Dominican Winter League championship, where the approximately 5,000 fans stood for every one of his at bats and screamed their support for the man they call *El Pelotero de la Patria* (the country's player).

**"What's wrong here," says Mateo, referring to U.S. attitudes toward steroids, "ISN'T SO WRONG [in the Dominican Republic]."**

DOMINICANS HAVE an easy explanation for their collective shrug whenever the subject of steroids arises. They argue that just as stealing bread is not a crime when a man is starving, taking performance-enhancing drugs is acceptable when a player is desperate to get off an island where the poverty rate hovers around 40%. "What's wrong [in the U.S.]," says Fernando Mateo, president of Hispanics Across America, a New York–based advocacy group that lobbies Major League Baseball on Latino issues, "isn't so wrong there."

For baseball, fighting steroid use in the Dominican Republic has been like throwing punches underwater. The island that produced nearly 12% of the major leaguers on last year's Opening Day rosters and more than 20% of the All-Star starters last July, also produced one-third of the positive drug tests in the major and minor leagues in 2007. Though the Dominican summer and winter leagues—where many of the country's top young prospects play even after they are signed by major league clubs—have tested for steroids since 2004, the country's labor laws prohibited teams from suspending players who tested positive; violators were instead referred to counseling. But after intense lobbying by Major League Baseball, the Dominican government reinterpreted its laws: Starting this summer, players who test positive will face the same escalating 50-game, 100-game and permanent suspensions doled out by MLB.

Meanwhile, Tejada, who is not known to have tested positive in the Dominican or in the U.S., refuses to discuss the Mitchell Report or the perjury investigation, on the advice of his lawyers. "I'm preoccupied with baseball," he says. "[The charges] affect me a lot, especially because what I've done is based all on hard work. I know I'm going to come out of this clean."

Astros general manager Ed Wade, who obtained Tejada from Baltimore the day before the Mitchell Report was released on Dec. 13, expresses no buyer's remorse for his high-priced ($26 million for the next two seasons) acquisition and expects him to report to spring training next week. Though Wade acknowledges that Tejada could face punishment (commissioner Bud Selig, for one, has not ruled out suspensions for players implicated in the Mitchell Report), he defends the trade, saying, "He's a middle-of-the-order power bat at a position that's normally reserved for defensive guys. We just felt that if we had the chance to put him in the lineup with Lance Berkman and Carlos Lee, and with the additions of Michael Bourn and Kaz Matsui at the top of the order, that it would make us very productive."

Wade was in the crowd for Game 2 of the Caribbean Series when Tejada sent a seventh-inning pitch over the leftfield wall for his 12th career home run in Series play, breaking the record held by Tony Armas. Tejada circled the bases quickly, pointing skyward in memory of Freddy. As he headed toward home, his entire team—and seemingly, a country—waited with open arms. □

ROB TRINGALI/SPORTSCHROME

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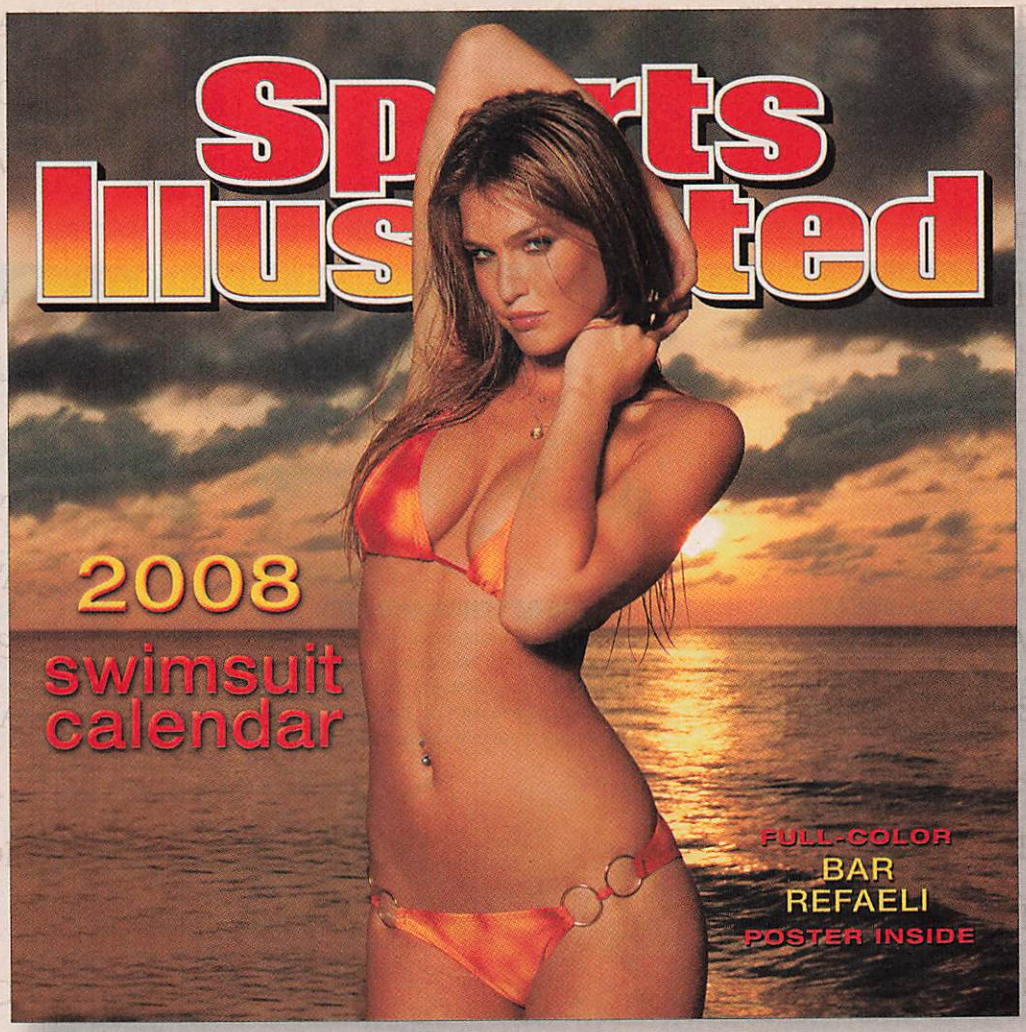
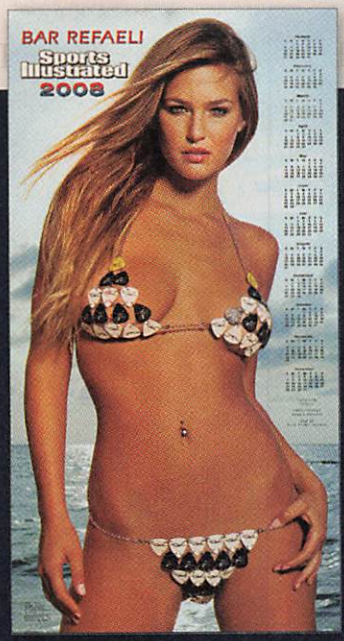
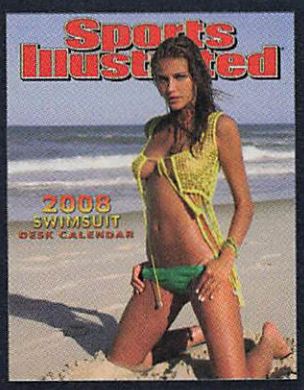



# 18 Months with SI's Swimsuit Models

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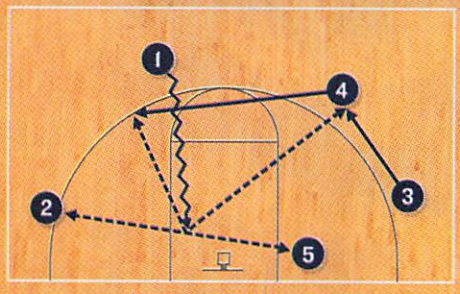
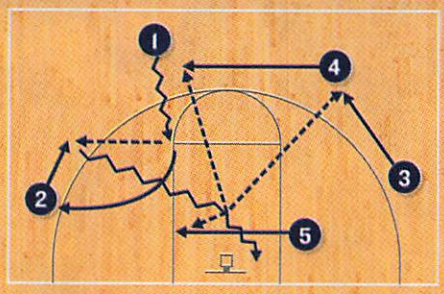
# Fast and Fur

## THREE FUNDAMENTAL DRIBBLE-DRIVE MOTION PLAYS



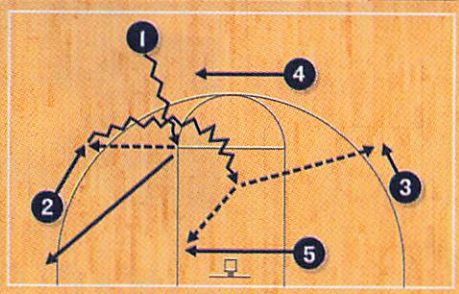

### THE ANKLE BREAKER

In one phase, the point guard (1) breaks down his defender on the dribble, driving the lane where he can either make a layup, dish to the weakside post man (5) or kick out a pass to an open teammate on the perimeter (2, 3 or 4).




### THE REVERSE AND KICK

In another phase, the point guard (1) drives to the elbow and passes to the shooting guard (2), who can shoot a three-pointer or drive to the hoop, where he'll be able to lay it up, dish to the post man (5) or kick it out to the perimeter (3 or 4).




### CYCLE AND REPEAT

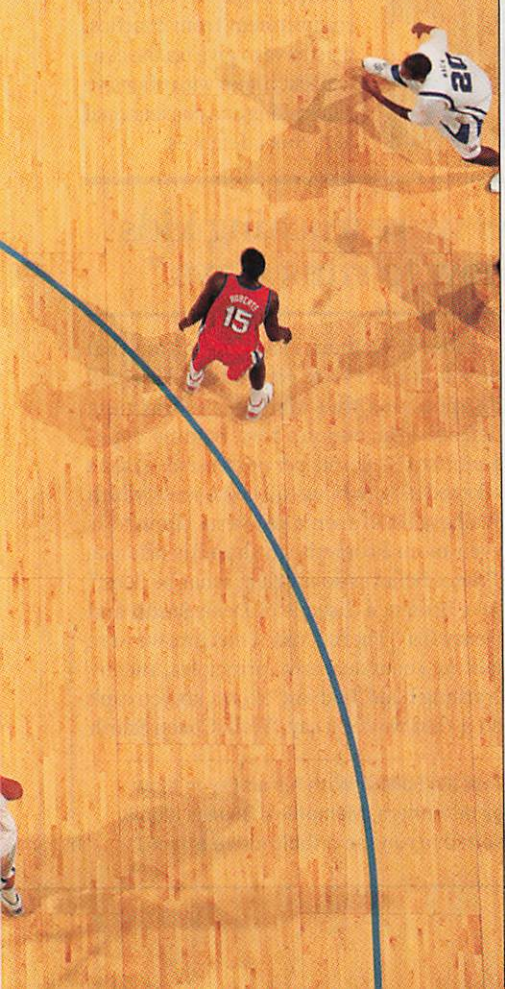
Players can rotate through DDM by getting a pass at the free throw line extended (2), penetrating the lane and looking to attack the basket, dump a pass to the post (5) for a layup or pass out to the wing (3) for a three-pointer.

# ious

## Unbeaten Memphis has climbed to No. 1 using the **Dribble-Drive Motion** offense, a relentless and innovative attack that's all the rage among teams at all levels, from high school to the pros

**BY GRANT WAHL**

Photograph by Greg Nelson



PLAY DIAGRAMS BY SLIM FILMS; RIC TAPIA/ICON SMI (WALBERG); FLOOR EXTENDED BY SI IMAGING

WHEN HOOPS HISTORIANS look back on the 2007–08 college basketball season, they may conclude that its most significant moment came on an Indian summer evening in October '03. At the head of a heavy oak table in his Memphis steak house sat Tigers coach John Calipari, who has led teams to both the Final Four and the NBA playoffs. Next to him was an obscure junior college coach from Fresno named Vance Walberg. For six days Walberg had observed Calipari's practices, continuing an annual pilgrimage that had given him deeper insight into the work of two dozen elite college coaches, from Bob Knight to Dean Smith to Billy Donovan.

But now, after the appetizers and the porterhouses had been cleared from the table, Calipari asked Walberg something that no other coach had bothered to ask him. "So tell me, Vance," he said, "what do you run?"

Walberg laughed. "You don't want to know," he replied. "It's a little bit off-the-wall."

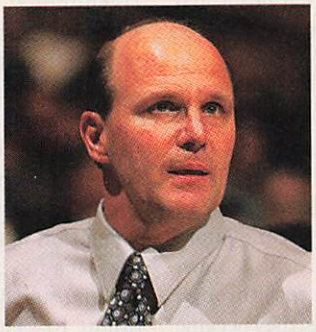
"No, really," Calipari said. "Show me."

And so, using a pepper shaker as the basket, white sugar packets as offensive players and pink Sweet'n Low packets as defenders, Walberg explained his quirky creation, a high-scoring scheme featuring four perimeter players and a host of innovations. Unlike Knight's classic motion offense (which is based on screens) or Pete Carril's Princeton-style offense (which is based on cuts), Walberg's attack was founded on dribble penetration. To Calipari, at least, it embodied two wholly unconventional notions. One, there were no screens, the better to create spacing for drives. Two, the post man ran to the *weak* side of the lane (instead of the ball side), leaving the ball handler an open driving path to the basket.

But there was plenty more. As Walberg pushed the packets through the phases of his offense, Calipari experienced a new kind of sugar rush. Walberg's scheme was madness. It was genius.

And it was unlike anything Calipari, an old-school motion and play-calling acolyte, had ever run. "The players are unleashed when they play this way," he says, "because every player has the green light to take his man on every play." When Calipari junked his playbook and switched to Walberg's offense, his mentors thought he had lost his mind. "You've won hundreds of games playing a certain way, and now you're going to change?" Hall of Famer Larry Brown asked him. "And it's a junior college coach from California? What are you, crazy?"

Now look. Through Sunday, Calipari's Tigers were 23–0, ranked No. 1 in the nation and aiming to become the first team to enter the NCAA tournament undefeated since UNLV in 1991. But Memphis is only the tip of the Walberg iceberg, a spreading mass of teams using the Dribble-Drive Motion offense—Calipari's felicitous term—at every level of the game *(map, page 52)*.



**THE MASTER** Walberg devised the attack that Memphis (left, in white) has ridden to the top.

In Jersey City legendary coach Bob Hurley, who adopted DDM two seasons ago, has taken St. Anthony (19–0) to No. 1 in *USA Today*'s national high school rankings. Likewise, Omaha Central High has won the last two Nebraska Class A state championships while running DDM, and Grand Valley High in Parachute, Colo., rode the attack to last year's Class 2A state title.

In California's Central Valley, where Walberg, 51, coached for 13 seasons at Clovis West High and four at Fresno City College, his high-pressure offense and defense have changed the way an entire region plays basketball. "It totally blew up here," says Fresno Central High coach Loren LeBeau, one of Walberg's former assistants. "We're in the top league in Fresno, and four of the six teams are running this style." Under coach Tom Gonsalves, the girls' team at St. Mary's High in Stockton has gone 25–0 and risen to No. 9 in the nation using DDM. Another practitioner, coach Jeff Klein at Chaffey Community College in Rancho Cucamonga, describes the system this way: "It's almost like Vance invented a new language."

The Denver Nuggets are running elements of DDM, and so are the Boston Celtics. "[Calipari] and I fax each other," says Celtics coach Doc Rivers. Meanwhile, one vocal DDM skeptic has changed his mind. "If I were fortunate enough to get back into coaching, I'd seek Vance's help in a minute," says Brown, who joined Calipari and Walberg last September at a clinic in Mississippi attended by more than 400 high school coaches. "When I was coaching UCLA, everybody ran the high-post offense and the 2-2-1 press because of Coach [John] Wooden. He won 10 national titles, so you could understand that. But to see all these people who are incorporating what Vance does is mind-boggling."

It's enough to make you wonder: Who the hell is Vance Walberg? How is his offense spreading around the nation? And if his brainchild is the hottest thing in U.S. basketball, why is he out of a job?

WHERE DO innovators come from? An original idea—the new new thing—can be sparked anywhere, but the majority of college basketball's greatest innovators share a common trajectory: Unlike most of today's top coaches, who rose through the college ranks as assistants, they became head coaches early, often in anonymous hoops outposts. Carril was 24 when he became the jayvee coach at Easton (Pa.) High, the same age Knight was when he took over his first team, Army. Two of today's most respected innovators are Wisconsin's Bo Ryan, exponent of the Swing offense, who became the coach at Sun Valley High in Aston, Pa., at 26, and Michigan's John Beilein, who won the top job at Newfane (N.Y.) Central High at 22 and later came up with the Five-Out offense.

No matter how obscure the team, "when you're a head coach you get to tinkering with what you want," says Walberg, who was 22 when he took over at Mountain View (Calif.) High. As a high school grinder over the years—he even coached badminton at one point—Walberg dabbled in variations of the flex offense and Knight's motion, among other schemes, but his real break came in 1997, when he had his Clovis West team use a cutting-edge "four-out" offense (i.e., four perimeter players) of the kind now favored by Saint Louis coach Rick Majerus.

"It was pure luck," Walberg says, despite all evidence to the contrary. His best player, a heady, relentless point guard named Chris Hernandez (who would later star at Stanford), was such a skilled dribble-penetrator that Walberg moved his post man to the weakside block, clearing two bodies from Hernandez's path to the basket. When Hernandez broke down his defender he had several options: 1) shoot an open layup, 2) pass to the post man (if his defender left him to stop Hernandez), or 3) kick the ball out to an open teammate on the perimeter (if his defender had sagged to help out on Hernandez). The open player could shoot a three-pointer, but if one wasn't available, the team would attack again.

Because there were no screens and attackers were spaced so far apart, the formation opened yawning gaps for penetrators, as long as they had the talent to beat their defenders and the smarts to read defenses on the fly. "I wish I had chosen a fancier name than AASAA, but I wanted kids to understand that it was attack-attack-skip-attack-attack," says Walberg. "What am I trying to say? Get to the rim. It's basically *here we come*." All of Walberg's teams hear the same slogan *(we like three-pointers, but we love layups)*, and shot charts reveal that the teams take almost no midrange jumpers.

Walberg's invention shares some elements with European-style drive-and-kick formations and the fast-paced spread offense of Phoenix Suns coach Mike D'Antoni, parts of which are being used by Duke, Texas and UMass. But Walberg is sui generis. Since '97 he has added myriad phases, wrinkles and—perhaps most important—an elaborate set of competitive practice drills (with names such as Blood, Cardinal and Scramble) that hone the fundamentals necessary for the offense. "Have you seen Vance at practice? Oh, man," says Brown. "His drills are all building blocks to his offense and defense, which is the key to coaching."

In fact, Calipari says he now does far more coaching in practice than during games, when he used to bark out play calls nearly every trip down the court. "The biggest strength of this offense," Walberg says, "is I feel we're teaching kids how to play basketball instead of how to run plays."

Dribble-drive is tailor-made for today's high school and college teams, which favor speed in the absence of classic back-to-the-basket big men, but it isn't for everyone. It requires quick, smart and talented guards who have a feel for the game. (See: Memphis point guard Derrick Rose.) It requires agile big men who can shoot from the perimeter and race downcourt. It requires deep benches and three-point shooters who can punish sagging man-to-man defenses and the inevitable zones. Not least, it requires complete commitment from coaches, who have to give up the control that comes with offensive play-calling and conventional half-court defenses.

**THE APPRENTICE** Calipari tweaked Walberg's offense, renamed it and ran with it.

**With Dribble-Drive Motion, Walberg says, "I feel we're teaching kids HOW TO PLAY BASKETBALL instead of how to runs plays."**

Indeed, Walberg is so committed that he might need to *be* committed. He's still disappointed that Memphis's swarming defense—the nation's best, holding opponents to 0.83 points per possession—hasn't adopted his gambling full-court press, which Walberg's California converts contend is even more Promethean than his offense. "Vance believes so much in what he does," says Brown, a disciple of Dean Smith and Henry Iba. "The first time I met him we were talking about defensive principles, and everything I said, he'd say, 'No, no, no, you can't do it that way.' I'd say, 'Well, Coach Smith

**THE NATURAL** With his ability to blow by defenders, Memphis's Rose is ideally suited to run the dribble-drive attack.

JOHN BIEVER (CALIPARI); GREG NELSON

GOVERNOR'S

and Mr. Iba taught me this.' And he'd still say, 'No, no, no.' Is he not a character?"

Walberg may have been a mad scientist, but he won games at an astonishing rate, usually with less talent than his opponents had. In the five years after it adopted his offense, Clovis West went 159–18, and during Walberg's four seasons at Fresno City College (2002–06) the Rams went 133–11, winning the '05 state juco title and regularly averaging more than 100 points a game. Nuggets assistant John Welch constantly observed Clovis West practices during his days at Fresno State under Jerry Tarkanian. He recalls, "People used to think it was funny: Why is a college assistant always over there with a high school coach? But I've been around some unbelievable coaches—Tark, Hubie Brown, Mike Fratello, now George Karl and Tim Grgurich—and I've learned as much from Vance as from anybody else."

By the summer of 2003 Welch had joined Hubie Brown's Memphis Grizzlies staff. One day he called his friend Calipari. "I've always respected Johnny Welch," says Calipari. "He's a basketball Benny, knows coaches, studies the game. He says, 'Look, I've got a guy coming in here, and I want him to spend some time with you. You ought to look at his offense.' "

WHY CHANGE? It may seem obvious now that they're coaching the nation's top-ranked teams in college and high school basketball, but Calipari and Hurley didn't need to overhaul their systems. Calipari, 49, had won 336 games in college and the NBA and had reached three Sweet 16s, two Elite Eights and a Final Four when he and Walberg sat down for dinner that night at Cal's Championship Steakhouse. During his first three seasons at Memphis, however, Calipari had coached in only one NCAA tournament game. "It's like you're a teacher, and you're teaching for 15 years, and your lesson plan never changed," he says. "This has been invigorating for me because it's gotten me to think, to study the game again."

Hurley, 60, had won 22 state championships, nearly 900 games and two mythical national titles as head coach at St. Anthony when he adopted dribble-drive in the fall of 2005. "I've had very few original thoughts in my life," Hurley says, "but I'm smart enough to take from people who are successful and seem to have a greater view of the game. We got to a point where kids spent more time in the weight room than out on the court working on skills. [Dribble-drive] gets you working on skills. You can move your center around. It doesn't have to be mud-wrestling where just the stronger, more physical, more athletic kids win."

Both coaches have added their own elements to Walberg's framework. Hurley uses what he calls "a European-style pick-and-roll," while Calipari departs from Walberg orthodoxy in several ways. Instead of going straight into the offense, Memphis sometimes swings the ball around the perimeter or springs the point guard with *(gasp!)* a ball screen. And instead of sending his post man straight to the lane's weak side, Calipari allows him to go on what Memphis calls a "rim run," in which the penetrating guard throws a lob in the vicinity of the basket for an alley-oop dunk.

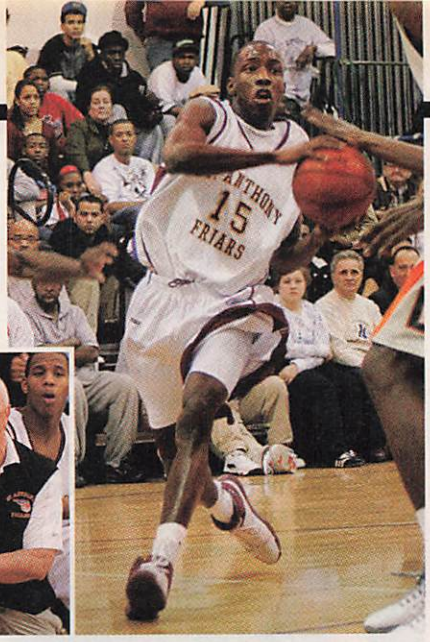
A born promoter, Calipari also came up with the name Dribble-Drive Motion for the offense. "It's just easier to understand," he says. "AASAA? Come on, what are you talking about?" Owing to the offense's continuous patterns, reads and backdoor cuts, he also branded it "Princeton on steroids."

Whatever you call it, Calipari's team is smitten. "It turned out to be great for us," says swingman Chris Douglas-Roberts, one of the nation's most gifted penetrators. "It's about spacing and players making plays. A lot of players who are in conventional styles

# Crossover Dribble

*Illustration by* Slim Films

**SI found 224 junior high school, high school, college and pro teams in North America that are running the Dribble-Drive Motion offense in some form.**



**THE OLD LION** Teaching DDM to players like Tyshawn Taylor rejuvenates Hurley.

JEFF ZELEVANSKY (2)

get bored sometimes because they feel like they can't show what they can do, but this offense lets a player show his strengths."

Although Calipari didn't adopt Walberg's scrambling full-court defense (he's convinced that winning at the highest level requires stopping opponents in the half-court), he did transform his defense in one major way. He says that during his days at UMass, from 1988 to '96, he wanted his teams to be *last* in the league in steals. "Why last? Because [gambling for] steals gets you out of position," he explains. "I wanted to give teams one tough shot, and that's it. Now we want to be *first* in steals—in the country. Because the way we play now, if the other team holds the ball, we're going to be on offense 30 percent of the time and on defense 70 percent. Now who's going to control the game? But if we're going after steals, we make them play faster." At week's end the Tigers had 8.7 thefts per game.

Opposing teams can play their own defensive trump cards, of course, and the most common gambit against Memphis's DDM attack has been to ditch man-to-man for zones and hybrid junk defenses, which clog the Tigers' driving lanes. Memphis has seen them all: 2–3 zones (Gonzaga), 3–2 zones (East Carolina), 1-3-1 zones (SMU), the triangle-and-two (USC). Arizona tried a two-man zone, with its post defenders stationed on the blocks. During its victory over Memphis in the 2006 NCAA West Regional final, UCLA used a one-man zone, keeping a big man in the lane.

The most successful defense against the Tigers this season was USC's triangle-and-two, which helped the Trojans take Memphis to overtime on Dec. 4 before losing 62–58. "We got tentative against USC," says Calipari, who calls more set plays against zones and says he has installed countermeasures for the triangle-and-two. (When Middle Tennessee State brought it out later in December, Memphis won by 24.) Besides, he adds, "if your primary defense is man but you're playing us zone, how will you be any good at it? And if you do stay in the game, what are you thinking with four minutes to go? *We can't beat these guys.*"

Perhaps, but it's also true that zones are more likely to expose the Tigers' potential Achilles' heel. Memphis shoots only 34.2% from three-point range. "John's got just about all the pieces," says Walberg, "with the exception of a knockdown shooter." Then again, a bad shooting night may not be enough to stop a team with perhaps five future NBA players. "Whatever you're running, you'd better have guys who can play," says Calipari. "If you forget that, you don't have to worry about being innovative."

The same could be said for Hurley's team, which includes six seniors (five of them guards) who have accepted Division I scholarships. Yet Hurley points out that

**NBA**
93 Denver Nuggets
139 Boston Celtics

**MEN'S DIVISION I COLLEGES**
66 Pepperdine Univ., Malibu, Calif.
186 University of Memphis
203 University of Texas at El Paso

**MEN'S SMALL COLLEGES**
9 Grand Canyon University, Phoenix
21 John Brown Univ., Siloam Springs, Ark.
25 Cabrillo CC, Aptos, Calif.
26 Bakersfield CC
34 Cal State–Dominguez Hills
44 De Anza CC, Cupertino, Calif.
51 Fresno City College
68 Moorpark (Calif.) CC
72 Coll. of the Desert, Palm Desert, Calif.
75 Chaffey CC, Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.
82 Palomar JC, San Marcos, Calif.
86 Columbia CC, Sonora, Calif.
89 Cal State–Stanislaus
90 L.A. Valley CC, Valley Glen, Calif.
94 Metropolitan State College, Denver
105 Oglethorpe University, Atlanta
110 Piedmont College, Demorest, Ga.
111 Emmanuel Coll., Franklin Springs, Ga.
122 Bethel College, North Newton, Kans.
123 Fort Scott (Kans.) CC
143 Blue Mountain (Miss.) College
147 Miss. Gulf Coast CC, Perkinston, Miss.
148 N.W. Mississippi CC, Senatobia, Miss.
175 Lock Haven (Pa.) University
214 Univ. of Puget Sound, Tacoma, Wash.

**WOMEN'S COLLEGES**
4 University of Alberta, Edmonton
5 Medicine Hat (Alberta) College
52 Fresno City College
60 Antelope Valley JC, Lancaster, Calif.
70 Cerritos CC, Norwalk, Calif.
138 Mount St. Mary's, Emmitsburg, Md.
171 W. Oregon Univ., Monmouth, Ore.
176 Robert Morris, Moon Twp., Pa.

**BOYS**
1 Russellville (Ala.) High
2 Vestavia Hills (Ala.) High
3 Nome-Beltz (Alaska) High
6 Valley Christian High, Chandler, Ariz.
7 Estrella Foothills High, Goodyear, Ariz.
8 Dobson High, Mesa, Ariz.
10 O'Connor High, Phoenix
12 Tolleson (Ariz.) Union High
14 Bentonville (Ark.) High
15 De Queen (Ark.) High
17 Dover (Ark.) High
19 Mansfield (Ark.) High
22 Trumann (Ark.) High
23 Valley Springs (Ark.) High
24 Servite High, Anaheim
27 Bakersfield High
30 Thompson High, Bakersfield
31 Westmont High, Campbell, Calif.
33 Jesuit High, Carmichael, Calif.
35 Sierra Canyon (Calif.) High
36 Otay Ranch High, Chula Vista, Calif.
38 Mesa Verde (Calif.) High
39 Clovis (Calif.) High
40 Clovis (Calif.) East High
42 Clovis (Calif.) West High
45 Valhalla (Calif.) High
47 Escondido (Calif.) High
49 Fresno Central High
50 Fresno High
53 Hoover High, Fresno
55 Garden Grove (Calif.) High
56 Granite Bay (Calif.) High
57 Hanford (Calif.) High
59 St. Francis High, La Cañada, Calif.
61 Le Grand (Calif.) High
63 Madera (Calif.) High
65 Madera (Calif.) South High
69 Newark (Calif.) Memorial High
71 Oceanside (Calif.) High
73 Paradise (Calif.) Adventist Academy
74 El Rancho High, Pico Rivera, Calif.
76 Riverbank (Calif.) High
77 Rocklin (Calif.) High
78 Rosamond (Calif.) High
79 El Camino High, Sacramento
80 Lincoln High, San Francisco
81 Valley Christian High, San Jose
83 Montgomery High, Santa Rosa, Calif.
84 Shafter (Calif.) High
85 Simi Valley (Calif.) High
87 Soquel (Calif.) High
91 Westminster (Calif.) High
92 Taft High, Woodland Hills, Calif.
95 Golden (Colo.) High
96 Peak to Peak High, Lafayette, Colo.
97 Lyons (Colo.) High
98 Palisade (Colo.) High
99 Grand Valley High, Parachute, Colo.
100 East Hartford High
102 Largo (Fla.) High
103 Vanguard High, Ocala, Fla.
106 Cairo (Ga.) High
107 Dalton (Ga.) High
109 Towers High, Decatur, Ga.
113 Metter (Ga.) High
114 West Hall High, Oakwood, Ga.
115 Woodstock (Ga.) High
116 Lebanon (Ill.) High
117 Rich Central High, Olympia Fields, Ill.
119 Shenandoah High, Middletown, Ind.
124 Oxford (Kans.) High
125 Bowling Green (Ky.) High
126 Muhlenberg (Ky.) South High
128 Trinity High, Louisville
129 Lone Oak High, Paducah, Ky.
130 St. Mary High, Paducah, Ky.
135 St. Thomas More High, Lafayette, La.
136 Southwood High, Shreveport, La.
137 Glenelg Country, Ellicott City, Md.
141 Minnetonka (Minn.) High
142 Ackerman (Miss.) High
144 Loyd Star, Brookhaven, Miss.
145 Byers High, Mount Pleasant, Miss.
151 Meadow Heights High, Patton, Mo.
152 Pleasant Hope (Mo.) High
153 Lafayette High, St. Joseph, Mo.
154 Lindbergh High, St. Louis
155 Webster Groves (Mo.) High
156 Willow Springs (Mo.) High
157 Omaha Central High
158 Wakefield (Neb.) High
159 St. Anthony High, Jersey City
160 Montclair (N.J.) Kimberley Academy
161 Wood-Ridge (N.J.) High
162 Millbrook High, Raleigh
163 Bishop McGuinness, Winston-Salem
164 Akron North High
165 Chardon (Ohio) High
166 Lebanon (Ohio) High
167 Monroeville (Ohio) High
168 Glandorf High, Ottawa, Ohio
169 Enid (Okla.) High
170 Okarche (Okla.) High
173 Pennsbury High, Fairless Hills, Pa.
174 Shaler Area High, Glenshaw, Pa.
177 Baldwin High, Pittsburgh
178 North Allegheny High, Wexford, Pa.
179 Bolivar (Tenn.) Central High
180 Cordova (Tenn.) High
181 Evangelical Christian, Cordova, Tenn.
183 Dyersburg (Tenn.) High
185 Lenoir (Tenn.) City High
187 Briarcrest Christian, Memphis
188 Melrose High, Memphis
190 St. Dominic School, Memphis
191 Dyer County High, Newbern, Tenn.
192 Hillsboro High, Nashville
194 Philadelphia (Tenn.) Elementary
195 Sale Creek (Tenn.) High
197 Union City (Tenn.) High
198 Baytown (Texas) Christian Academy
199 Hays High, Buda, Texas
200 Clear Lake High, Houston
202 Billy Ryan High, Denton, Texas
204 Everman (Texas) High
205 North Crowley High, Fort Worth
206 Groom (Texas) High
207 Langham Creek High, Houston
208 St. Thomas High, Houston
209 Lufkin (Texas) High
210 Midland (Texas) High
211 Coll. Park High, The Woodlands, Texas
212 Patrick County High, Stuart, Va.
213 Puyallup (Wash.) High
215 Fife High, Tacoma, Wash.
216 Benton (Wis.) High
217 Cuba City (Wis.) High
219 Green Bay Southwest High
220 Badger High, Lake Geneva, Wis.
221 Middleton (Wis.) High
223 Prairie du Chien (Wis.) High
224 North High, Sheboygan, Wis.

**GIRLS**
11 St. Mary's High, Phoenix
13 Batesville (Ark.) Junior High
16 Dover (Ark.) High
18 Pulaski Academy, Little Rock
20 Pocahontas (Ark.) High
28 North High, Bakersfield
29 Stockdale High, Bakersfield
41 Clovis (Calif.) East High
43 Clovis (Calif.) West High
46 Valhalla High, El Cajon, Calif.
48 Bullard High, Fresno
54 Rosary High, Fullerton, Calif.
58 Hanford (Calif.) High
62 Livermore (Calif.) High
64 Madera (Calif.) High
67 Merced (Calif.) High
88 St. Mary's High, Stockton, Calif.
108 Dalton (Ga.) High
112 Pope High, Marietta, Ga.
120 Shenandoah (Ind.) High
127 Butler Traditional High, Louisville
131 Tilghman High, Paducah, Ky.
132 Logan County High, Russellville, Ky.
133 Allen County–Scottsville (Ky.) High
134 Clark High, Winchester, Ky.
140 Mercy High, Farmington, Mich.
146 Byers High, Mount Pleasant, Miss.
149 SBEC, Southaven, Miss.
150 Meadow Heights High, Patton, Mo.
172 Nyssa (Ore.) High
182 Dyersburg (Tenn.) High
184 Greenfield (Tenn.) High
195 Sale Creek (Tenn.) High
196 Indepen. High, Thompson's Sta., Tenn.
218 Glenwood City (Wis.) High
222 Middleton (Wis.) High

**AAU**
32 Carmichael (Calif.) Red Raiders
37 South Bay (Calif.) Sports Academy
101 Nike Team Florida, Clearwater, Fla.
104 Georgia Stars, Atlanta
118 Indiana Elite LNO, Indianapolis
121 Iowa Barnstormers, Iowa City
189 Memphis War Eagles
193 Nashville Celtics
201 Full Court Athletes, Dallas

*Special reporting by Caitlin Moscatello*

talented players can always improve their skills, and he swears by Walberg's high-intensity practice drills. In fact, some coaches think Walberg's drills are his crowning achievement. "It's like a franchise for McDonald's," says Welch. "Not only are you getting a system, you're getting built-in drills to teach your system."

For all their success using DDM, Calipari and Hurley have one major difference. Calipari made three trips to visit Walberg in Fresno, studied his game tapes and spent hundreds of hours speaking to Walberg about his offense. But Hurley and Walberg have never sat down and talked. One day last year they finally connected over the phone. "I love your Blood drills," Hurley told Walberg. "They're really great."

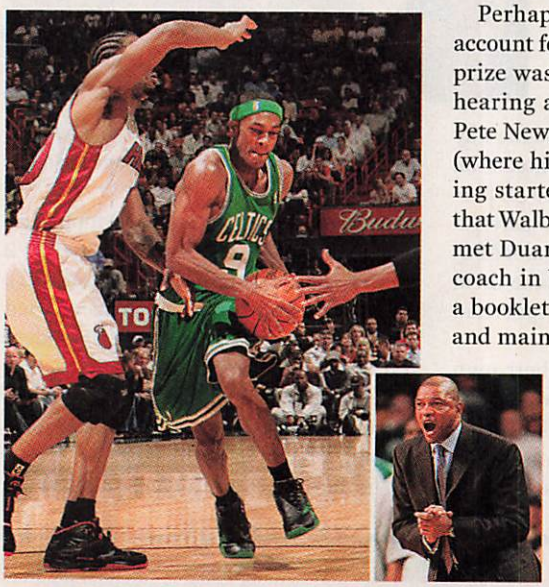
For a moment there was silence on the other end of the line. Walberg didn't know whether to be proud that Hurley had fallen for his creation or horrified that one of his most closely held secrets had crossed the continent. "Blood drills?" he said at last. "Bob, how do you know about Blood drills?"

HERB WELLING doesn't look like one of the most wired social connectors in U.S. basketball. By day he's a security guard at Omaha Central High, where he moonlights as an assistant coach for the boys' basketball team. A short, pear-shaped man, Welling, 45, wears tight purple Omaha Central T-shirts that make him look like a smaller cousin of the McDonald's character Grimace.

But underestimate Welling at your peril. He's the tactical brains behind Omaha Central, which has used DDM to win the last two Nebraska state titles and draw sellout crowds of rabid fans (including the Sage of Omaha, investor Warren Buffett, who knows a good product when he sees one). For years Welling was the righthand man to Howard Garfinkel at his famed Five-Star Camps, where Welling met the top college and high school coaches in the country. "Herb and I talk once a week," says Hurley. "He originally called me, and we started talking about [DDM]." Before long, Welling had sent Hurley more than 200 pages of notes on the offense.

But how had Welling "cracked the code," as he puts it? DDM wasn't something you could master from a phone call or a few game tapes or even from attending a clinic, which reveals no more than 10% of the scheme's secrets, according to Calipari. Welling had never visited one of Walberg's or Calipari's practices, but he remained undaunted. "I'm kind of psychotic for finding out stuff," he says. "At school they call me the Minister of Information."

**THE PRO** Rivers (inset) exchanges faxes with Calipari and has guard Rajon Rondo and the Celtics using elements of DDM.



Basketball coaches are a secretive lot. Indeed, for Walberg, sharing has always been a double-edged proposition. "I want to help people because a lot of people helped me," he says, "but [DDM] is kind of my ace in the hole." Before dribble-drive broke nationally, Walberg would host dinners at his home for interested coaches from Fresno-area high schools and junior colleges, often sharing information liberally—perhaps too liberally. "Vance is too unselfish with his offense," says his friend Brad Felder, the Hanford (Calif.) High coach. "In the long run it will hurt him because the longer [the offense] is out there, the more others will adapt."

These days Walberg and Calipari have a policy: They'll let coaches observe their practices; they'll send them game tapes; they'll answer questions and host clinics. But Walberg and Calipari won't give out their playbooks, and they refuse to make instructional videos. "I want to wait a few years," says Walberg, who estimates he gets more than 300 calls a year from coaches seeking info about his offense. "I talked with John, and we didn't really want it out."

Adds Calipari, "If I wanted to do these tapes, I could make a ton of dough. But that's Vance's money. That's not my money."

Perhaps, but the two coaches didn't account for Welling, whose pursuit of the prize was relentless. In 2005, after first hearing about Walberg's offense at the Pete Newell Big Man Camp in Las Vegas (where his stepson was a camper), Welling started breaking down game tapes that Walberg had sent him. Then Welling met Duane Silver, a retired high school coach in Waco, Texas, who had written a booklet on the drive-and-kick offense and maintained a coaching website. Silver introduced Welling to John Jordan, the coach at St. Francis High in La Cañada, Calif., who attended Walberg's clinics and drove six hours nearly every week to scout his games and practices in Fresno.

Jordan sent Welling a 100-page dossier on Walberg's offense and defense, which landed, in turn, on Hurley's desk in New Jersey. "Then I got various materials that they don't even know I have," says Welling. "We had about every clinic that Walberg's ever done. We had his practice booklet and a lot more. It would blow you away, but then I'd have to shoot you."

**"It's like a franchise for McDonald's," Welch says. "Not only are you getting a system, you're getting BUILT-IN DRILLS to teach it."**

The Minister of Information also has Walberg's lingo down cold, from *drop zones* to *Blood drills*. And that's only the start. Last summer Welling made two DDM instructional videos—one with the offense and one with practice drills—that sell for $39.95 each or $71.95 together (plus shipping and handling) through Sysko's, the basketball-

DAMIAN STROHMEYER (RIVERS); HEINZ KLUETMEIER

MORE
In the Post
College basketball insight and analysis in Grant Wahl's mailbag, every Wednesday.
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video retailer. "It's the Number 1 seller out of our catalog over the last year," says Sysko's executive Jim Blaine, "and it's only been out for seven of those 12 months."

That's right: Herb Welling, a security guard from Omaha, is outselling videos by Wooden, Carril, Duke's Mike Krzyzewski and North Carolina's Roy Williams. Told of Welling's success with his invention, Walberg—who turned down a Sysko's offer—manages only a thin smile. "Well," he finally says, "I guess that's America."

The way Walberg sees it, though, that's the least of his concerns at this point.

IN DIAGRAMS the dribble-drive is represented by what coaches call a squiggle: a zigzag line with an arrow at the end. It's an apt symbol as well for Walberg, who's trying to move forward while whipsawing from one emotional extreme to the other. On the one hand, he's enjoying the ultimate in mainstream professional respect. The top teams in the NBA (the Celtics), college (Memphis) and high school (St. Anthony) are running his stuff, and it's spreading like a benign virus through the sport he loves. Yet at the same time this is the most excruciating moment of his 30-year career. On Jan. 18, midway through his second season at Pepperdine, Walberg abruptly resigned.

Both he and Pepperdine athletic director John Watson insist that he wasn't forced out, but Walberg says his dream job on the majestic shores of Malibu had become untenable. After winning 92% of his games at Fresno City College, his rebuilding Waves teams had gone 14–35. But it wasn't just about the losing. Since the summer of 2006 Walberg had lost six players through transfers and one through expulsion, erasing the depth that his attacking style demands. Meanwhile, at least one parent—Terry Tucker, the father of two Pepperdine players—was unhappy about things Walberg had done in practice: making one player suck his thumb for acting like "a baby," calling another player "a p---y" and labeling another "a turnover midget."

Though Walberg apologized to the last player and Watson took no disciplinary action—he ruled that Walberg's actions were "inappropriate" but not abusive—the tension and the losses were a volatile mix. During the three weeks before his resignation, Walberg says, he slept no more than 2½ hours on any night. Why wouldn't his players commit all the way like he had? "It just became really tough," Walberg says, struggling for words. "My wife and kids, we talked and talked. It was like a big part of my life was being taken out of me. I love coaching so much. You can't imagine not getting your players to buy in. They weren't bad kids, but I just couldn't get 'em over the line."

Those squiggles on the page are worth only so much, after all. *Whatever you're running, you'd better have guys who can play.* "If you believe in God, there's a reason for me to go through this," Walberg says. "What it is, I don't understand right now."

Walberg doesn't know what comes next. His friends say he was happiest at the high school and juco levels, where his teams won and the gyms were always filled. But he could also end up as an NBA assistant or perhaps join the Memphis staff. Walberg won't have trouble finding work. And for now, when he despairs, he can always flip on the TV and watch Calipari's team run the offense that he laid out in sugar packets on a restaurant table five seasons ago.

"No matter what, I'm super happy for John," Walberg says. "At least I know it works." □

JOHN BIEVER

**THE STUDENTS** Their coach has had to give up some control, but the undefeated Tigers have still thwarted every defense thrown at them.

## Walberg is enjoying the ultimate in professional respect. Yet this is the MOST EXCRUCIATING moment of his 30-year career.

From: *Ray West*
Subj.: *Why!*
Date: *Sat., Jan. 19, 2008, 11:28 p.m.*
To: *Vance Walberg*

*Dear Mr. Walberg,*
*I am very sorry to hear of your resignation. I am just a small-school high school coach that studies the game more than most. I know you are an unbelievable innovator in a time of no innovations in basketball. You are brilliant! You can tell me to go to hell, but I must know the real reason you resigned. You didn't give it much time to recruit your style of players. I am 12–1 using your offense! I hope you coach again, you have been very nice to me with your help. You can e-mail me or just leave me wondering. Best of luck in the future. I hope you coach again. Thank you.*
*Respectfully,*
*Ray West*

# THERE'S A NEW DEALER IN TOWN.

These days, teens don't have to go out looking for drugs; they can just go to the medicine cabinet. Even as teen use of "street drugs" is on the decline, the abuse of prescription drugs is increasing. The perception is that they're safe even though abuse can lead to paranoia, addiction, seizures, and death. You can prevent abuse by safeguarding and monitoring your family's medications. Educate yourself. Find out more at theantidrug.com. You can stop the dealer.

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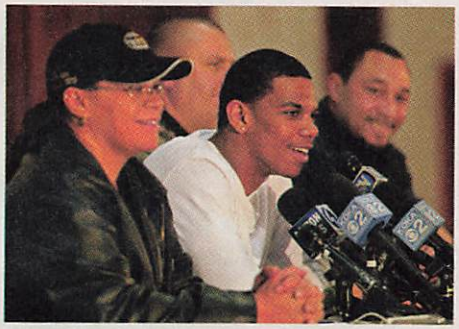
# All Eyes on Terrelle



As college coaches and fans across the nation waited, quarterback **Terrelle Pryor**, the most coveted recruit in the land, decided not to make a decision

**BY JACK McCALLUM**

*Photograph by* Barry Reeger/*Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*

FOR ONE hour on a drizzly, unseasonably warm morning last week, Jeannette, Pa., a blue-collar burg of about 10,000 that lies 25 miles east of Pittsburgh, was the center of the college football world. That's where native son Terrelle Pryor, an 18-year-old uncommonly blessed by nature and toughened by both his Jeannette homeboys ("They're the reason I am where I am") and the rugged western Pennsylvania pigskin tradition, announced that, yes, he would be saving some school's football fortunes come August, but he still wasn't sure whose. That a teenager's not being able to make up his mind would generate national headlines (ESPNU and CSTV carried Pryor's no-news press conference live, and SI was among other national publications in attendance at the Jeannette High gym) says everything about the meat-market mania of college recruiting and national signing day. Though Pryor's indecision exasperated those close to him—most of them had been sure 24 hours earlier that he had chosen Ohio State over Michigan, thought to be the last two schools standing in this most intense of recruiting battles—it also speaks to the bewilderment that Pryor must be feeling after spending months as the nation's It Recruit.

It's easy to understand why so many are so invested in the young man's future. In Jeannette, where football is king, Pryor is the grandest of Friday Night Lights heroes, a 6' 5½", 225-pound quarterback with a sprinter's speed and an arm that can throw a football more than 70 yards. Since he is also one of the state's top basketball players, slack-jawed fans have routinely proclaimed him "the best athlete I've ever seen."

A few days before Pryor announced his intention to equivocate, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*'s Mike White, who collaborated with Pryor on a recruiting diary for the newspaper, was recognized as he paid a toll on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. "So, where's he going?" the collector asked. (The writer said, "I was just [with him], and I have no idea.") Says White, "Without a doubt, Terrelle is the most hyped, most talked-about, most watched athlete we've had in the history of western Pennsylvania." That is no doubt accurate since other western Pennsylvania worthies such as Tony Dorsett and LaVar Arrington and quarterbacks with names like Unitas, Namath, Marino and Kelly came along before the Internet age.

But even when you are considered that One in a Million, the Difference Maker, the Program Turner, it is hard to say no

**DUAL THREAT** The highly touted Pryor, with his mother and Batch (above), can pass and run with equal prowess.

AL TIELEMANS

Pryor
SCOTT
CANNETTE
71

to persuasive adults schooled in the art of enticement.

So it is that Pryor will make an official visit to Penn State, long thought to be the Big Ten's Third Wheel in the Pryor sweepstakes. And while he's at it, Pryor has said that he might as well make a visit to Oregon, where coach Mike Bellotti runs an attractive spread offense, also the primary ammunition that new Michigan coach Rich Rodriguez pulls out in an effort to lure Pryor to Ann Arbor.

Linebacker U was the real surprise. No one but Pryor can say for sure that he is genuinely considering taking his high-def game to a school with an analog offense, but it's certain that he feels pressure to make an official visit. Over time, amid the sweet nothings whispered by all the college coaches, Pryor had gotten on well with Penn State recruiters Tom Bradley and Jay Paterno. Eighty-one-year-old Joe Paterno himself showed up one day near the end of the recruiting process.

Around town there are a lot of Penn State people. Dick Hoak, a Jeannette legend five decades before Pryor came along, played running back for the Nittany Lions and still attends most of Pryor's football and basketball games. Hoak doesn't say much to Pryor, but his friend, a 78-year-old restaurateur named Tony DeNunzio, a Penn State fan and unabashed admirer of JoePa, is somewhere in the corner of the Pryor picture. DeNunzio says that he doesn't impart his own opinions to Pryor ("I just love the kid and what he's done for Jeannette," says DeNunzio), but he has driven around Pryor and his friends when they need a lift and used to give them free meals at his restaurant.

On (non-)signing day, Pryor said that the major reason he will make an official Penn State visit is the affection that Craig Terrelle Pryor, his father, feels for ace recruiter Bradley, the Lions' defensive coordinator. "My dad is, like, in love with him," says Pryor of Bradley. That's, like, a lot of pressure. Many insiders still believe that Pryor will sign with Ohio State, but prognosticators will be more wary in the coming weeks.

"Terrelle's got a lot of people telling him a lot of things," says Jeannette football coach Ray Reitz. "It's easy to understand why it's difficult for him."

Whether the heavy-breathing pursuit of Pryor foreshadows great things to come or is a cautionary tale about the unpredictability of potential remains to be seen. It's easy to determine that a running back with 4.2 speed is going to be able to get around the corner at the next level and that a 300-pound lineman with a 400-pound bench press is going to be able to knock people over. But Pryor's great gifts aside, can he locate his secondary receivers when pressure comes? Can he check off when the defense is massed to stop the called play? Can he maintain his bravado when the offense is backed up to the goal line and 10 sets of uncertain eyes look to him for inspiration? He routinely ran away from trouble as a high school star—observers swear that

**Whether the pursuit of Pryor foreshadows GREAT THINGS or is a cautionary tale about the unpredictability of potential remains to be seen.**

CAROLYN KASTER/AP (PRYOR); ARISTIDE ECONOMOPOULOS/THE STAR-LEDGER (HILL); COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI (MIAMI HELMET)

# The Top 5 Classes

The colleges that fared best, as ranked by SI

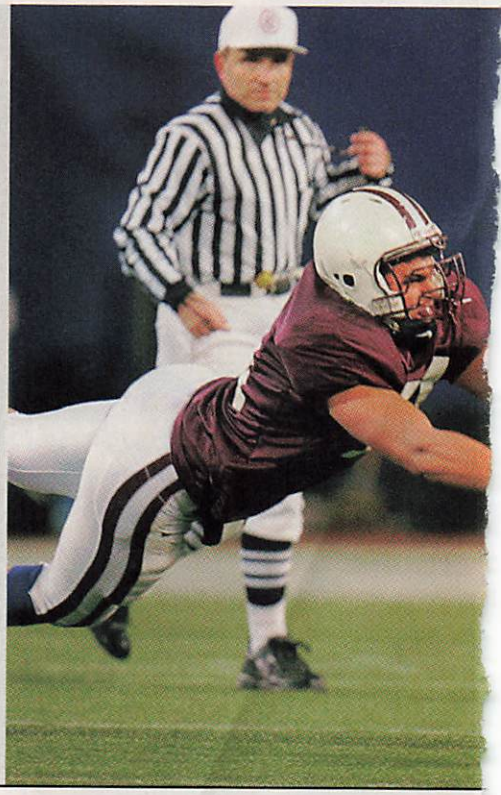
**1** **ALABAMA, 32 signees** Just as he did at LSU, coach Nick Saban dominated in-state recruiting, landing 14 of Alabama's top 20 prospects. His best catches: WR **Julio Jones** (Foley) and ATH **Burton Scott** (Vigor High in Prichard).

**2** **NOTRE DAME, 23 signees** The Irish had snagged 19 players by last July, and all but one stayed on board despite Notre Dame's 3–9 season. Expect WR **Michael Floyd** of Cretin-Derham Hall (St. Paul) to play immediately.

**3** **MIAMI, 33 signees** Coach Randy Shannon hauled in the nation's best crop of LBs. He also signed 10 of the top 12 players in Miami-Dade, including DT **Marcus Forston** (Northwestern) and CB **Brandon Harris** (Washington).

**4** **FLORIDA, 22 signees** Coach Urban Meyer's third-straight top five class is heavy on defense, most notably the safety tandem of **Will Hill** *(right)* from St. Peter's Prep (Jersey City) and **Dee Finley** (Auburn, Ala.).

**5** **CLEMSON, 26 signees** The Tigers secured an early pledge from the highly coveted DE **DaQuan Bowers** (Bamberg-Ehrhardt in S.C.) then got a signing-day bonus in explosive Trinity Christian (Jacksonville) RB **Jamie Harper**.



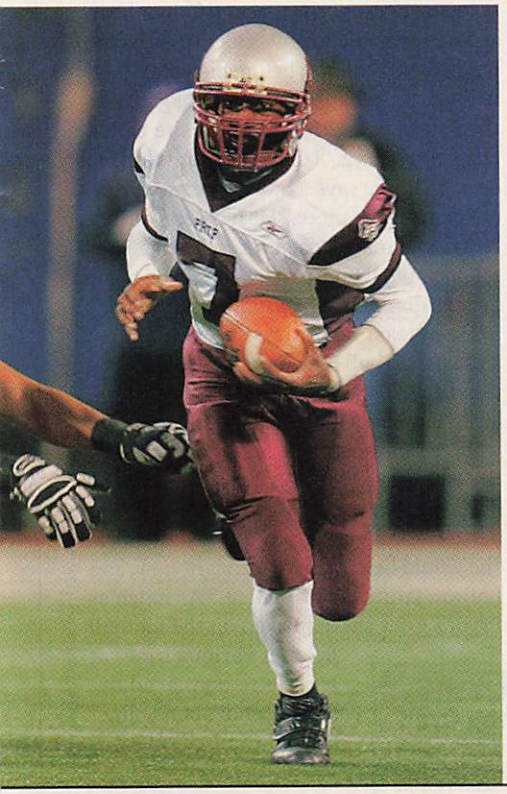
there were games in which he literally was not touched by the defense—but you can't do that in college, never mind in the NFL.

"Probably 85 percent of the time some kind of change has to be made at the line of scrimmage by a college quarterback," says Colorado coach Dan Hawkins, "and that rarely happens in high school. Sometimes it's something simple like keeping the same play but running it to the other side. But that reading ability is something that's hard to gauge about a high school quarterback, even one who's been as successful as Terrelle."

Charlie Batch, the Pittsburgh Steelers and former Eastern Michigan quarterback who is Pryor's recruiting adviser and close family friend (four years ago Pryor went to a camp Batch ran), has told the young man, "Mobility and speed will only get you so far." But Batch also says the message got through a long time ago. "Terrelle is very smart about the quarterback position."

Though Pryor's size and stats suggest a second coming of dual-threat Heisman-winning quarterback Tim Tebow of Florida—his career yards at Jeannette were almost equally divided between rushing (4,250) and passing (4,249)—he has been compared most often to the Tennessee Titans' Vince Young because of his sheer athleticism. But Pryor takes umbrage at the supposition that he

JOE VITTI/INDIANAPOLIS STAR (GRAY); DARREN CARROLL (PRINCE); JOHN ALBRIGHT/ICON SMI (BROWN)



# Recruiting Notebook

## Surprises at Minnesota, K-State and elsewhere

### GOPHERS STRIKE GOLD

Despite coming off a 1–11 season, Minnesota's Tim Brewster beamed like a champion on signing day. "It's truly amazing," said the second-year coach after he landed a consensus top 20 class at a school that hasn't reached a New Year's bowl since 1962.

Brewster, who spent 13 years on Mack Brown's staffs at North Carolina and Texas (and recruited Vince Young for the latter), was hailed as a master salesman when Minnesota hired him 13 months ago. He lived up to the billing with his first full class, which includes U.S. Army All-America QB **MarQueis Gray** *(right)* of Ben Davis (Indianapolis) and Skyline (Dallas) first-team All-Texas safety **Keanon Cooper**.

Brewster signed players from 16 states and estimates his staff traveled an average of 35,000 miles a week in the month leading up to signing day. (Still, there was one top recruit he missed out on—his son Nolan, a four-star safety from Mullen High in Denver, chose Texas.) Brewster also had a key selling point: The Gophers will move to a new on-campus stadium in 2009, and prospects were treated to a virtual tour of the facility on their visits.

### JUCO BOUNTY

While it's not uncommon for teams to sign a handful of junior college transfers, Kansas State's 32-member class includes a staggering 19. Citing his team's youthful returning roster and a daunting 2008 schedule that includes Kansas (12–1 in '07), Missouri (12–2) and Oklahoma (11–3), third-year coach Ron Prince *(right)* defended the approach by saying he needed "an older and more mature team."

Prince's predecessor, Bill Snyder, relied heavily on J.C. players to build top 10 teams in the late '90s. His 1997 class featured 12 juco transfers, including quarterback Michael Bishop, the Heisman runner-up who helped the Wildcats go 22–3 over two years. Prince, 12–13 in his first two seasons, could gain a similar boost if his signees turn out as advertised; 10 of them are on SuperPrep's juco top 100 list, topped by RB **Daniel Thomas** (Northwest Mississippi Community College).

### CHANGE IS GOOD

Of all the recent college coaching hires—including such big names as Rich Rodriguez at Michigan, Bobby Petrino at Arkansas and Rick Neuheisel at UCLA—no one recruited as aggressively in a short amount of time as Larry Fedora at Southern Miss. From the time of his Dec. 12 hiring the former Florida and Oklahoma State offensive coordinator reeled in 27 prospects, including five-star WR **DeAndre Brown** *(right)* of Ocean Springs (Miss.) and Franklin County (Meadville, Miss.) four-star DT **Bo Tillman**.

The more high-profile coaches also made strong first impressions. Rodriguez finished with a top 10 class for the Wolverines by stealing away Trotwood-Madison (Trotwood, Ohio) RB **Michael Shaw** from Penn State and Lake Gibson (Lakeland, Fla.) OL **Ricky Barnum** from Florida. Petrino landed Michigan transfer QB **Ryan Mallett** and beat out USC for Central Arkansas Christian (Little Rock) CB **Joe Adams**. And Neuheisel held on to UCLA's early signings by retaining defensive coordinator and top recruiter DeWayne Walker and attracted Crespi (Encino, Calif.) QB **Kevin Prince**.

*—Stewart Mandel*

# Instant Impact

## The 10 freshmen who will immediately make their mark

**1 TERRELLE PRYOR**, QB, *Undecided*—By scoring 36 TDs and throwing for 23 more last fall, Pryor scored nearly once every four times he touched the ball for Jeannette (Pa.).

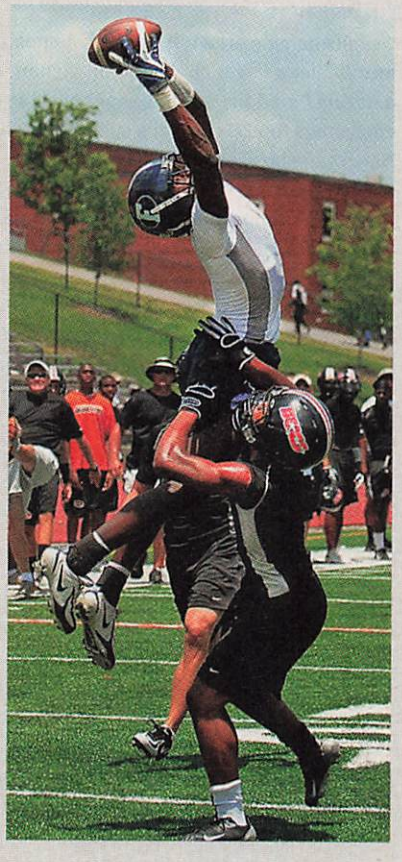
**2 JULIO JONES**, WR, *Alabama*—The 6′ 4″, 210-pound Alabama Mr. Football *(right)* from Foley High is the crown jewel of Nick Saban's top recruiting class.

**3 DARRELL SCOTT**, RB, *Colorado*—The St. Bonaventure (Ventura, Calif.) star, who ran for 2,433 yards and 33 TDs in 2007, will play a major role in rebuilding the Buffs.

**4 A.J. GREEN**, WR, *Georgia*—The lanky Summerville (S.C.) speedster finished his high school career at No. 2 on the alltime national list with 5,373 receiving yards.

**5 PATRICK JOHNSON**, CB, *LSU*—The one-time Miami commitment from Ely (Pompano Beach, Fla.) is a fast (4.47 in the 40), physical (6′ 1″, 197) shutdown corner.

**6 JERMIE CALHOUN**, RB, *Oklahoma*—Next great East Texas back follows Adrian Peterson and Billy Sims to OU; in '07 he ran, caught or threw for 2,800 yards and 36 TDs at Van.



**7 KYLE RUDOLPH**, TE, *Notre Dame*—Five-star prospect from Elder (Cincinnati) is 6′ 7″, 235 and can make the big play: He averaged 18.2 yards on 37 catches with 11 TDs last fall.

**8 RAHIM MOORE**, S, *UCLA*—The early commitment from Dorsey (Los Angeles) stuck with the Bruins through the coaching change; he's a playmaker with 21 picks in three years.

**9 AARON WILLIAMS**, CB, *Texas*—The 6′ 1″ corner with 4.4 speed had 10 sacks and three interceptions for McNeil (Round Rock, Texas) in '07; he'll help a weak Longhorns secondary.

**10 NICK PERRY**, DE, *USC*—Versatile King (Detroit) star played as many as nine defensive positions and set the Michigan record with 36 sacks last fall. —*Joe Lemire*

has simply outrun and outleaped everyone to reach greatness. At the U.S. Army All-American Bowl, a high school all-star game played in San Antonio on Jan. 5 in which he was named MVP after leading the East to a 33–23 victory over the West, he says he encountered several players with speed superior to his. "It's about angles and thinking on your feet and knowing how to play," he says. "Look, I don't want to be like Vince Young. I don't like it at all when I hear that. Nothing against Vince, who's been real nice. We've talked on the phone. But it's just that I don't see myself as him at all. I like Tom Brady. I admire how he handles the team, the way he freezes the defense with pump fakes. I want to be that kind of quarterback."

There are, of course, other comparisons that could be made. Ten years before Pryor came along, a young man named Ronald Curry blazed a trail to two-sport immortality at Hampton High in the Peninsula District of southeastern Virginia, earning national player of the year honors as both a football quarterback and a basketball point guard. He was recruited madly and chose North Carolina—where he had a desultory two-year career as the latter and a mediocre four-year career as the former. He never did make it as an NFL quarterback, although he led the Oakland Raiders in receiving last season with 55 catches for 717 yards. Not exactly the kind of precedent Pryor wants to hear about.

PRECEDENTS MEAN precious little to the wunderkind who on a recent January morning sat in a conference room in Jeannette High's main offices. That room had become his second home, Fawning Central for college coaches and the media. As he talked, he displayed his generation's artful multitasking, juggling two cellphones, compulsively checking and sending messages. An Associated Press reporter texted Pryor while he was attending a Michigan basketball game during a recruiting trip on Jan. 19 and breathlessly reported the young man's response to a question about his visit—"It's cool."

Pryor agrees, that, yes, life has been strange ever since he was identified as the nation's No. 1 recruit before his senior football season began. One day he logged onto the Internet and found a website called terrellepryor.org. "I didn't have anything to do with it," he says. "I would've put different pictures up there." He has received letters from fans of dozens of colleges. "They tell me, 'We'll take care of you if you come here.' I don't pay any attention to them."

He at least has turned down the heat from basketball recruiters by announcing that he will concentrate on football in college. At week's end Pryor, a small forward, was averaging 21.9 points per game for the 16–4 Jayhawks. "If Terrelle would've never touched a football," says former Jeannette High hoops coach Rick Klimchock, "he would be talked about, right now, as a LeBron James type of talent." As much as Pryor's gifts are displayed on the football field (at various times at Jeannette he played defensive end, outside linebacker and free safety as

TOM LEE (JONES); SIMON BRUTY (NEWSOME)

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well as quarterback), they are even more manifest on the court, where he is divested of pads. He reaches full speed almost immediately. When he takes off on the wing, he's often downcourt before the ball can find him. If he's near the basket, he'll dunk. At the same time, he depends way too much on his athleticism. He tries outlandish passes and can't believe it when they don't work.

Pryor's there's-nothing-I-can't-do mentality is apparent in football, too. "His biggest weakness—and it's correctable—is that he has to learn how to get rid of the ball a little quicker," says Reitz. "He's always looking for the big play, and sometimes he has to just get positive yardage."

But that's often how it is with gifted athletes. And one intangible asset Pryor will bring to college is that he is "Jeannette tough," as he puts it. When he was in eighth grade he and his mother, Thomasina, who is separated from Craig, moved to nearby West Mifflin. But the son was unhappy being away from the kids with whom he started in midget ball as a six-year-old. He returned to Jeannette and moved in with his godfather, Willie Burns. His mother lived 45 miles away in Jonestown (until she returned to Jeannette last week, and was joined by her son), and his father still lives in nearby West Newton (where he was visited by Penn State's Bradley). "Everybody always says athleticism is natural," says Pryor, "but you can pick it up, too. A lot of mine came from the kids I played with all the way through. I made them better, and they made me better."

He perks up at a question about his future: Will he come back to Jeannette one day even if he is an NFL star? "I already know I will," he says. He gazes out the window, past, presumably, the entryway to Jeannette High, past the tree line, past the closed-up glass factories that once were the town's hallmark, into a future that must seem both golden and uncertain. "I'm thinking about maybe having a drive or a street named after me, something like that," he says.

Pryor Parkway perhaps?

"That sounds good," he says, smiling. Sometimes, even when you're the Next Big Thing, it's hard to leave home. □

# The Tebow Effect

## Quarterbacks who not only possess pinpoint accuracy but also can run over a linebacker are becoming all the rage

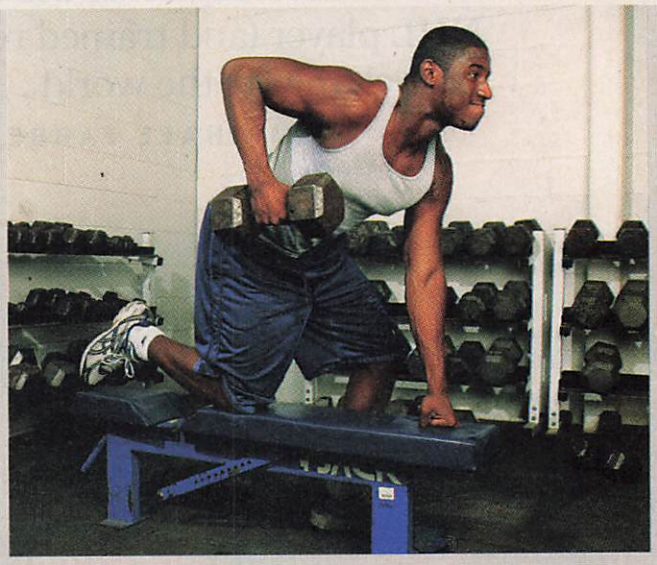
THE CREWCUT-TOPPED high school junior blew away the field at a camp in Tallahassee, Fla., in May 2005. He ran the 40 in 4.69 seconds and the agility shuttle in 4.16 seconds. He bench-pressed 185 pounds 38 times, and he jumped 32 inches from a standstill. His Sparq Rating—a statistic that combines measurements of speed, strength and power—was 96.9, off the charts for a quarterback.

Some 31 months later Tim Tebow was holding the Heisman Trophy, the result of a sophomore season at Florida during which the 6′ 3″ 235-pounder accounted for 55 touchdowns (32 passing, 23 rushing). On national Signing Day, evidence of the Tebow Effect was everywhere.

Four programs anxiously awaited a decision from Jeannette (Pa.) High's Terrelle Pryor. At 6′ 4″, 220 pounds, signee MarQueis Gray of Ben Davis High in Indianapolis had Minnesota coaches envisioning touchdowns through the air and by land. Other schools were also beaming at having landed strong-armed quarterbacking behemoths who can drop their shoulder and bowl over a defender. Dayne Crist from Notre Dame High in Sherman Oaks, Calif., stands 6′ 5″, weighs 228 pounds and runs the 40 in 4.6 seconds. After a year in the weight room Crist will probably be bigger than most linebackers he'll face while playing for Charlie Weis at Notre Dame.

At Florida State, offensive coordinator Jimbo Fisher would love for E.J. Manuel of Virginia Beach to emulate JaMarcus Russell, whom Fisher coached at LSU. Manuel has the size (6′ 5″, 220) and the arm, and he averaged 9.5 yards a carry as a senior at Bayside High.

Coaches are already looking ahead to next year, scouring the nation for a big, agile speedster with a rocket arm and the strength of an ox. The search has led some to Los Alamitos (Calif.) High, where 6′ 4″, 210-pound Clark Evans throws from the shotgun and runs single-wing plays. It has taken others to Western Branch High in Chesapeake, Va. Meet Kevin Newsome, a 6′ 3″, 215-pound premier hurdler with a bazooka for an arm.



**STRONG ARM** In his first year directing the spread, the versatile Newsome threw for 13 touchdowns and rushed for 12 more in '07.

As a freshman backup, Newsome ran single-wing plays out of the shotgun in short-yardage situations. Before last season newly promoted coach Scott Johnson installed the spread, and Newsome accounted for about 50% of the Bruins' offense.

Sound familiar? Tebow played linebacker and tight end as a freshman at Trinity Christian Academy in Jacksonville. Then he transferred to Nease High in Ponte Vedra, where coach Craig Howard saw him as the perfect quarterback for his spread attack. As a freshman at Florida, Tebow often spelled Chris Leak in short-yardage and goal line situations.

Newsome already has scholarship offers from Virginia Tech, Penn State and other schools, and Johnson entertained Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer two weeks ago. "Most [college coaches] are saying they're looking for two quarterbacks—a drop-back and a dual threat," Johnson says. "A lot of it revolves around Tim Tebow. They saw what you can do with a player like that."

*—Andy Staples*

# A Northern Light

In an Inuit region of the Canadian subarctic, former NHL player (and trained rocket scientist) **Joé Juneau** is changing the world . . . one slap shot at a time

BY MICHAEL FARBER | *Photographs by* Simon Bruty

IF THE GOAL of the modern executive is a corner office with a view of the water, Joé Juneau is first-team all-FORTUNE. His office in the Kuujjuaq Forum, with its panorama of the village and the broad Koksoak River, offers a glimpse of the timeless and the temporary. Hunkered against the uncompromising elements of the stark and stunning Canadian subarctic, prefab Kuujjuaq, a town of 2,100 and the metropolis of the 14 villages dotted onto northern Quebec's vast Nunavik region, looks as though it could be packed up and carted off in half a day's work.

Juneau, who played 12 seasons in the NHL, has brought grassroots hockey to a place where there are no grass roots. His embryonic Nunavik Youth Hockey Development Program gets 180 boys and girls between the ages of five and 16—most of them Inuit, some white—skating, passing, stickhandling and shooting at the Forum, a rink that seats 200 and doubles as a community center. Juneau is not merely teaching hockey to these children, some of whom recently learned to skate by pushing chairs on ice. He is also proselytizing, selling the therapeutic power of pucks as a way to education, nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. You don't have to be a rocket scientist

LOU CAPOZZOLA

**BIGGER THINGS** Juneau, who went to the finals with the Capitals in 1998 (top), believes his youth program in Nunavik is his greatest accomplishment.

to discern the possibilities of such a program in an area where alcoholism rates are critically high, temperatures are frostbite low and the social safety net often sags under the weight of communities in crisis. Yet the man who designed the program is precisely that. Before beginning a career in which he won an Olympic silver medal in 1992, scored 102 points as a Boston Bruins rookie in 1992–93 and went to Stanley Cup finals with the Washington Capitals and the Buffalo Sabres, Juneau, from Pont-Rouge, Que., earned a degree in aeronautical engineering in just three years from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He did it despite studying in a language that he could not speak when he started at the university.

"I always put my RPI degree ahead of what I did in the NHL," says Juneau, who scored 156 goals before retiring in 2004. "But I think this program here in Nunavik is the biggest accomplishment of my life."

Juneau hardly has the social conscience or do-good market cornered among athletes, but his story might be the most moving: He has moved 800 miles north from his opulent home outside Quebec City to Kuujjuaq (pronounced KOO-joo-ack), where he has settled into a modest four-bedroom house with his companion, Elsa Moreau, and their two young daughters. The first-generation rink rats who gambol in the Kuujjuaq Forum are not simply his pupils, not merely statistics in a Band-Aid social experiment. They are also his neighbors. In other words this isn't exactly a charity golf tournament Juneau is staging.

Looking out from his office window on a shimmering October morning last year, as the tamarack trees burned orange and a dusting of snow from the previous night slowly melted, Juneau was asked whether he viewed the village laid out before him as beautiful or ugly. "Beautiful but dirty and disorganized," he replied. A week later, dissatisfied with that response, Juneau sent this e-mail.

*After thinking about it, the answer is obvious to me. When I look towards town, I see where the Inuit now have to live. And when I look at the wide open* [spaces] *around the village, I see where they really belong, what they love, and what the adults need to be happy in their life. . . . The kids are growing up pretty much like kids from the South* [of Canada]. *They have 100 channels on TV, the Internet, computer games. None of that was here 10 years ago. The pace that the people are asked to adjust at might be too fast. The reality is 50 years ago, some of the Inuit were still being born in igloos.*

*This is the big gap that is represented as we look out my window: the land and the village, the nomad and the sedentary, the Inuit culture and the white culture, the past and the present, the physical survival (finding food and shelter at −50 Celsius* [−58° Fahrenheit]) *and now the mental survival (learning how they fit in this new world while at the same time fighting to keep their culture intact). . . .*

This is indeed a chasm, like the one that sometimes exists between being merely an elite athlete and being a complete human being.

IN THE hockey fraternity, Juneau was always considered a freak. He played drums and read books and pondered the environment at a time when going green in the NHL meant a trip to Hartford to play the Whalers. The son of a forest ranger, he had a love of space that went beyond the 200-by-85-foot parameters of the rink and some of the narrow thinking that envelops the game. "I'm not saying Joé's weird," says Montreal defenseman Patrice Brisebois, a friend and former teammate, "but he al-

**FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES** Juneau is a coach and mentor to 180 children, many of whom enter his program only able to skate while pushing a

"Drug addiction and suicide have become problems OF ALARMI

ways liked doing things that were different." Juneau took the road less traveled. Now he works at the 58th parallel, in a place where there are no roads other than the streets of Kuujjuaq. Except one. Curling past the Forum atop the hill, this road snakes by the occasional home, curls past a dump filled with rusting Ski-Doos and other detritus of northern life, meanders near patches of tamaracks and then, after 15 miles, dead-ends. Just like that. The locals refer to it as The Road to Nowhere, which is where a life here can end if you are not careful.

Suicide is the leading cause of death in Nunavik. According to Statistics Canada, 22% of the people who died there between 2000 and 2002 did so at their own hands. That galling figure helps explain why, while the average life span for a Canadian man or woman is 79.5, for an Inuit it is 66.9. An April 2007 provincial report on youth-protection services in Nunavik concluded that alcohol, drug addiction and suicide "have become problems of alarming proportions in all age groups. Poverty adds to the difficulty of the situation, and children are often the first victims. Many children live in conditions that are quite simply unsuited to their need for protection and security. A large number of children are physically, psychologically and sexually mistreated."

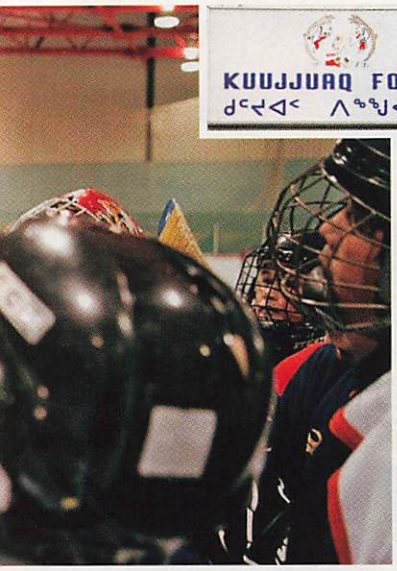
Juneau first visited Nunavik on a caribou-hunting trip in the summer of 2004. On a return trip in the spring of '06 he saw that a tin-roofed rink in Kangiqsualujjuaq, northeast of Kuujjuaq, was virtually deserted while Inuit children played in the street without supervision. Within weeks Juneau had presented a plan for his hockey program to the Inuit-run Makivik Corporation, part of the latticework of agencies that make one of the least-populated areas in North America one of the most heavily regulated. The program set forth 10 objectives, which included educational tie-ins, crime prevention, the development of local coaches who could meet standards set by the Quebec Ice Hockey Federation, nutritional instruction and community volunteerism.

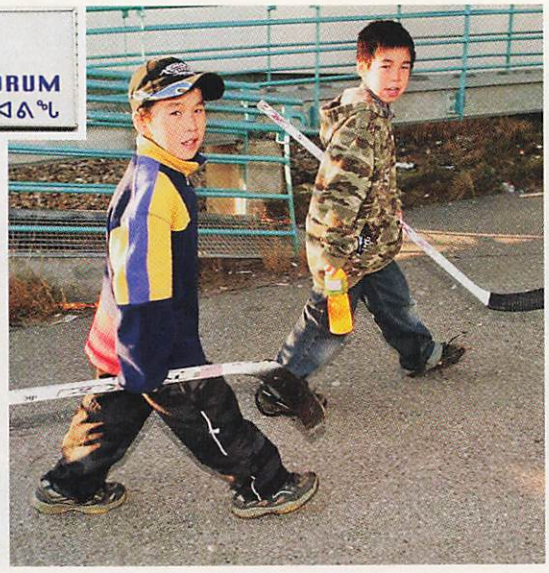
"We took him up on it right away," Makivik Corporation president Pita Aatami says. "We'd talked about it ourselves, had hired people, but it was never very well run, very well structured, until we hired Joé. We had an arena, but the kids weren't playing hockey. We want our kids to have a healthier lifestyle. There is much more alcohol and different drugs coming to the north. What he designed wasn't a hockey program but really a social program."

With an initial budget of $1 million from the Makivik Corporation and the Kativik Regional Government, Juneau began work in the fall of 2006. He would spend one or two weeks a month in Nunavik, usually staying in Kuujjuaq but also hopscotching by plane among the villages. The program began to blossom in the rocky soil—the 180 participants represent a third of the eligible children in Kuujjuaq—but the now 40-year-old Juneau was not satisfied. "Every time I left here and went home, I found myself the next morning wishing I was here to continue this," he says. "There's so much to be done. You disconnect for two or three weeks, you lose the continuity. I had a decision. Either I could keep doing it this way and hope for the best, or I could take the next step: moving here."

Elsa Moreau, who has lived with Juneau as his partner for 10 years, made the decision easy. "If he were here to open a business or something, I would have said no. But he's investing in a mission, something bigger than himself. This is a *grand projet humain*," she says in French, at the kitchen table in the home she and Juneau share. The house had been used by policemen who rotate through the region until it was renovated for Juneau's family. Ophélie, 7,

chair. To reap the pleasures of learning such basic drills as the center-ice belly flop, the kids need to stay out of trouble in school. And they do.



## NG PROPORTIONS," said a youth-protection report on Nunavik.

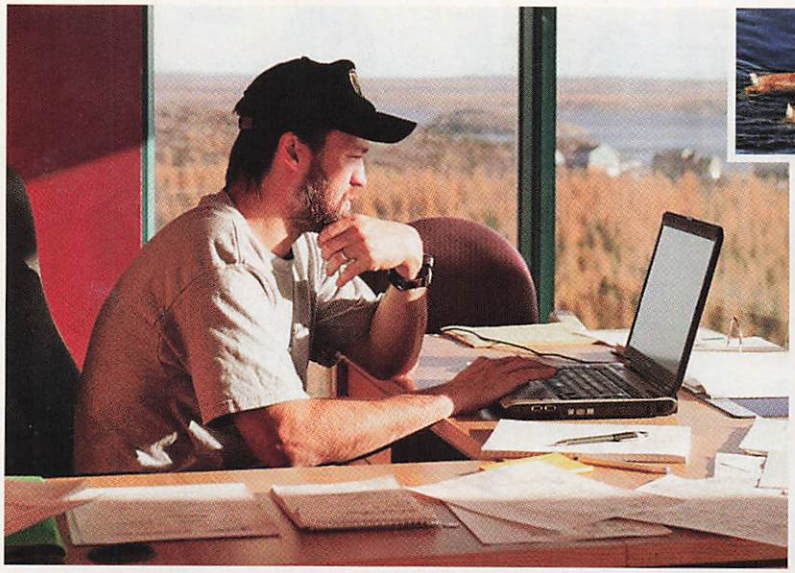
and Héloïse, 6, each have their own small bedroom. Another has been turned into an arts-and-crafts room for the girls, who are homeschooled in the mornings and attend French immersion classes at the local grammar school in the afternoon. Their father runs them to school and hockey practices in a black Jeep supplied by the Kuujjuaq recreation department. He is paid $4,000 a week for spending 36 weeks in Nunavik. If the salary, about one quarter of the current program budget, seems substantial, consider that the cost of living in Kuujjuaq is almost 60% higher than in the southern part of the province. The salary is also a fourteenth of what he earned in his final NHL season.

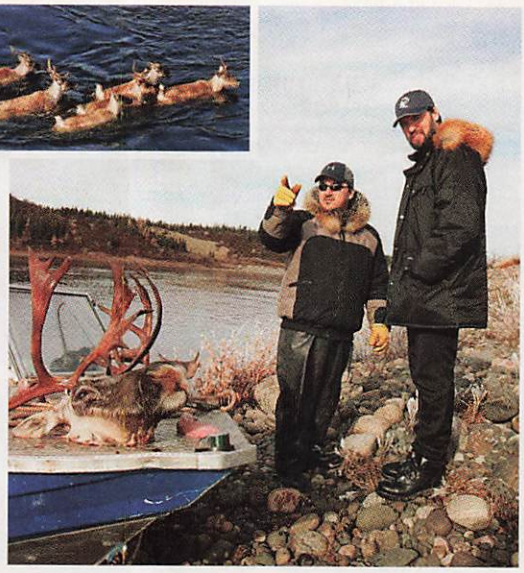
"We all find it unusual that he's here," says Mary Aitchison, 55, assistant director general of the Kativik School Board and one of the village elders. Her son Kyle, 12, is in the hockey program. "The children know he played for the Montreal Canadiens, and that makes a real difference. The modeling is what's working here. I don't know anything about hockey, but I support this because I see its effect on my little boy. The condition for playing is he has to do well at school, so it's giving him that focus and extra energy."

There are, in fact, three conditions for children who want to stay in the program, wear the uniforms and maybe make the travel team that will play in the international peewee tournament that begins this week in Quebec City. They are not judged on schoolwork, per se, but on attendance, behavior and effort. On Friday afternoon, teachers at the grammar and high school fill out forms assessing each student in these three categories. Juneau tabulates and monitors. (He is often on the ice three hours a day—organizing drills that are sometimes as elementary as having younger children skate to center ice and belly flop, acclimating them to falling—but he seems to spend triple that time in meetings and doing paperwork.) Early in the season Juneau barred nine children for a week. The following week all had improved their comportment enough to be reinstated. Says Dallacy Suppa, whose 12-year-old son, Collin, is in the program, "[Collin's] effort has been great since [the program started]. He helps me a lot at home with cleaning, and with his little brother and sisters. He never complains about homework anymore. I'm glad this program came up north."

Apparently a hockey stick can be a wonderful carrot.

**WORK-LIFE BALANCE** Away from the rink and his office duties, Juneau learns about Inuit culture, including the reliance on the caribou.





# In Nunavik SHOOTING GEESE is like GOING TO THE A&P.

IF JUNEAU is teaching Nunavik about hockey, the north is teaching Juneau to pick his battles. He might be able to take on the vending machine supplier at the Kuujjuaq Forum—the junk food has been removed—but he takes on Mother Nature at his peril. In early September he flew to Kangiqsujuaq to supervise the hockey program for a week that turned out to be, in his word, a "disaster." For the villagers of Kangiqsujuaq, the Canada and snow geese that were flying out on their autumnal migration were of far more interest than Juneau's flying in to run his hockey program. According to Statistics Canada, 98% of Inuit households in Nunavik hunt and fish for sustenance. For the Inuit, going out to shoot geese is like going to the A&P.

Juneau was sitting in Pita Aatami's office at Makivik Corporation last autumn when Aatami received a phone call that the migrating George River caribou herd was passing through the Manitou Gorge, about 50 miles upriver from the village. In an instant Aatami's mood changed, from official to almost giddy. He canceled a meeting for that evening with village mayors who had flown in to Kuujjuaq.

For the freezers, the uncommonly late migration of the herd was a belated bless-

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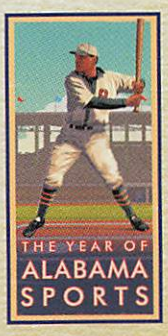

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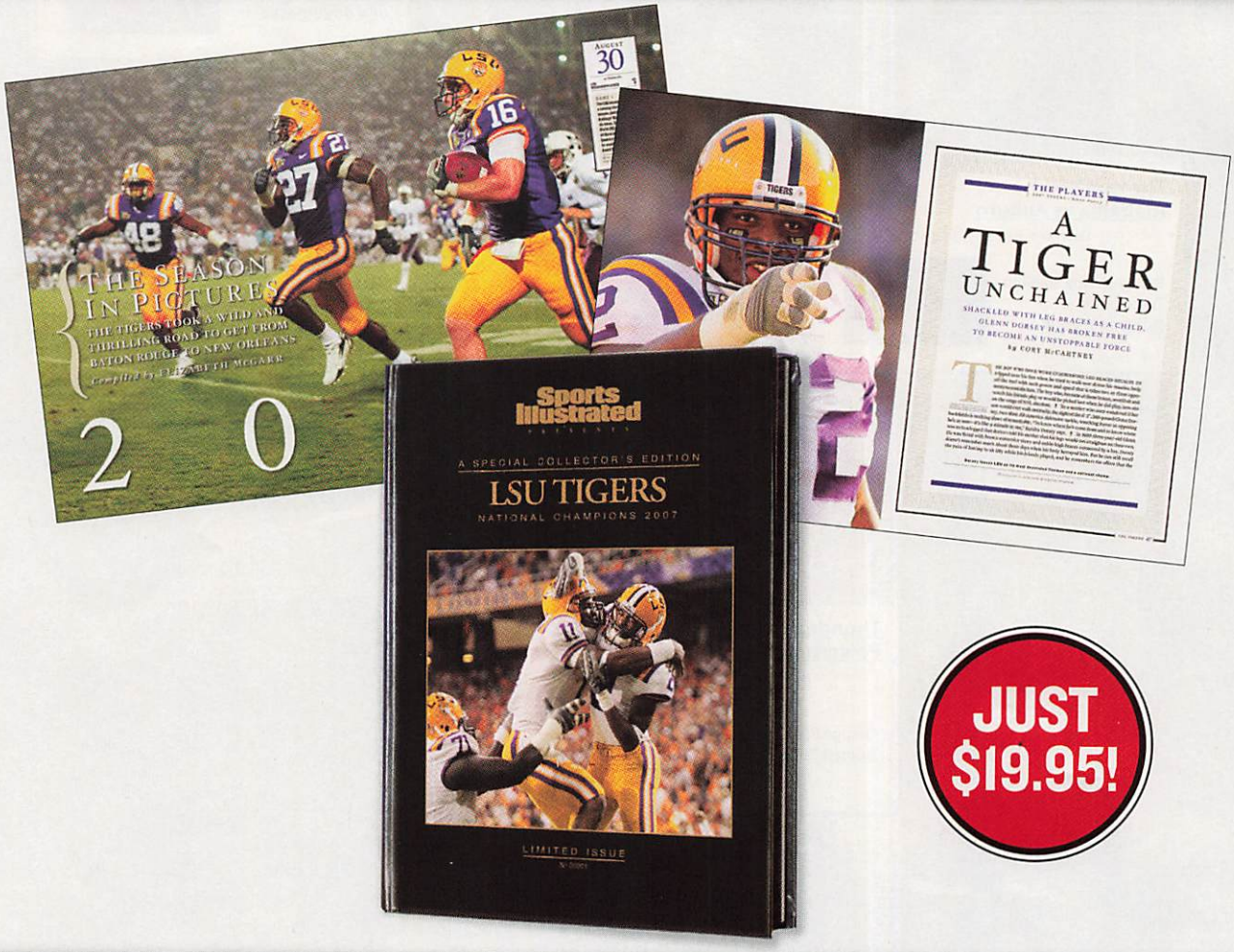
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ing. For the hockey program, it was a reminder that sports are not really life and death. (The day after Juneau's meeting with Aatami, on a whiteboard at the high school that lists absentees and their excuses, the word "hunting" was written next to the name of one child.)

As word of the caribou spread, powerboats began taking off into the Koksoak River, a small flotilla that would travel three hours to where the river splits into the Larch and the Kaniapiskau. Caribou were everywhere, bounding near the banks of the river or swimming between shores. There were also hundreds of carcasses; at least 300 caribou drowned while trying to traverse the roiling Limestone Falls.

Juneau temporarily lost his arena manager, Jason Aitchison, another of Mary Aitchison's sons, who left that day and would camp out and continue to hunt until he had shot and skinned nine caribou, all that his small boat could handle. Juneau's chief referee also bolted for the hunt. When Juneau took to the ice late that afternoon, he was amazed to discover that one of his hockey assistants, Randy Gordon, 19, hadn't gone with his father upriver.

"I told you I'd be here at practice," Randy said, "so I was." Juneau rewarded Gordon, who once had a Junior A tryout, with a trip to Manitou Gorge the next morning to join in the hunting. Randy says he has shot maybe 50 caribou in his life. Last year he bagged his first beluga, with a harpoon. (The Hartford Whalers might be history but not the Inuit whalers.)

Randy is part of a long tradition of men who live off the land, and Juneau is grooming him to be part of what might become a new tradition, the hockey program in Nunavik. Juneau originally agreed to run it for two years, then extended the agreement for another two after the initial season. But he won't live in the north forever. Indeed, if some schooling issues for his daughters are not resolved, he might go back to commuting to Nunavik for the final two years. "Every chance I get," Juneau says, "I tell the people here that this is their program, not mine."

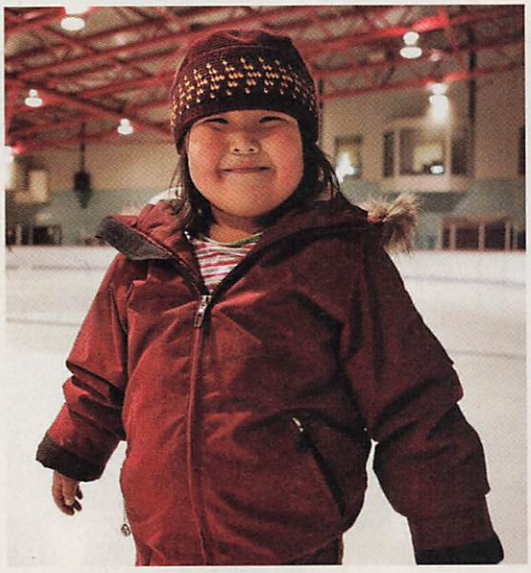
THIS MIGHT be Juneau's most distinctive accomplishment in an uncommon life, but really, how many lives in Nunavik will change? Can a harsh and haunting landscape be remade through sport? And in the circular world of the Inuit, can a vulcanized rubber disk find its place?

There's goodwill for the Nunavik Youth Hockey Development Program at the moment. The schools are supportive. Inuit parents have been uncharacteristically attentive. ("I heard one parent who's never been involved before say, 'Well, I guess if Juneau can coach, I can too,' " says Joanne Barrett, a 10th-grade English teacher at the local Jaanimmarik school.) And more money will be coming. During the next three years the provincial government will underwrite 80% of the $30 million needed to renovate the sports facilities throughout Nunavik. With the exception of the Kuujjuaq Forum, which opened in late 1991, the others are basically glorified barns.

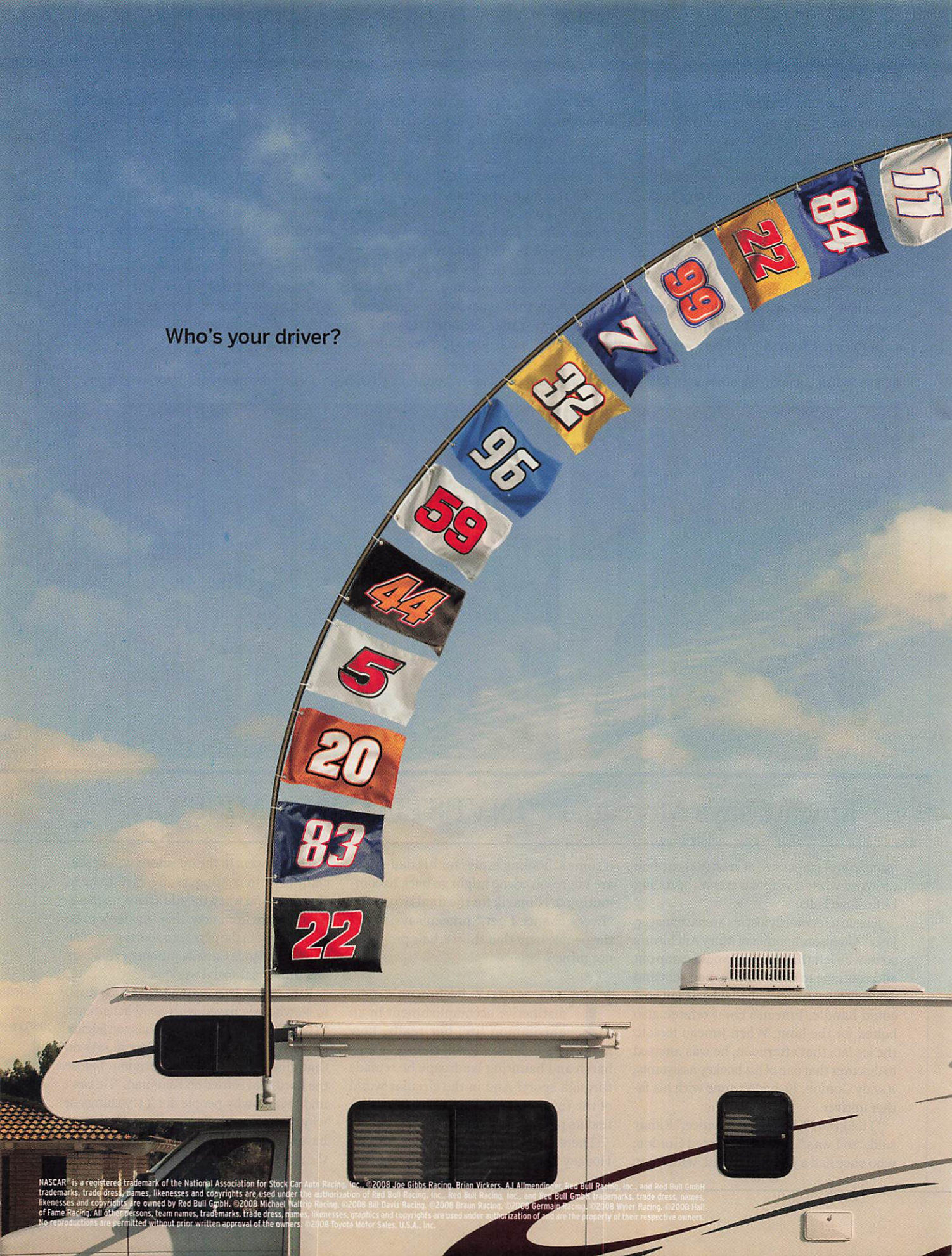
The answers to the questions will be glacially slow in coming, as life used to be in Nunavik. And when they do arrive, a generation or more from now, they are likely to be recorded not in the pages of a sports magazine but by Statistics Canada number crunchers and provincial social workers.

Right now, it is enough that The Road to Nowhere is paved with good intentions. "The thing with Joé is that he has confidence in himself to do anything," Moreau says on that glistening autumn afternoon, before the hard cold settles on Kuujjuaq. "He can't understand why people don't try things or why they get easily demoralized. He doesn't have the same parameters of life. For him, the sky's the limit." □

**SETTLING IN** Juneau, together with Moreau and daughters Héloïse (red pants) and Ophélie, live modestly among Inuit neighbors.



## Juneau, says Moreau, is "INVESTING IN A MISSION."

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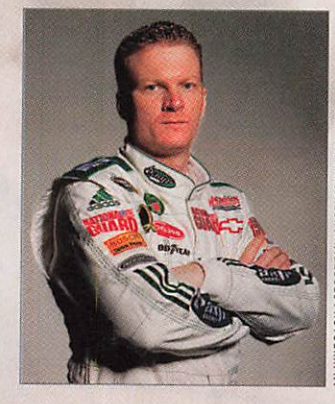
# Fired Up

BY LARS ANDERSON

*Photograph by* Mark J. Rebilas/US Presswire



MICHAEL J. LEBRECHT II/3DEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY

THEY CAN'T take their eyes off him. Especially not now. Not on this winter afternoon in Charlotte, when the most popular driver in NASCAR—and the sport's most desirable bachelor—is stripping and tossing his clothes aside one piece at a time.¶ As Dale Earnhardt Jr. unzips his blue jeans in a small conference

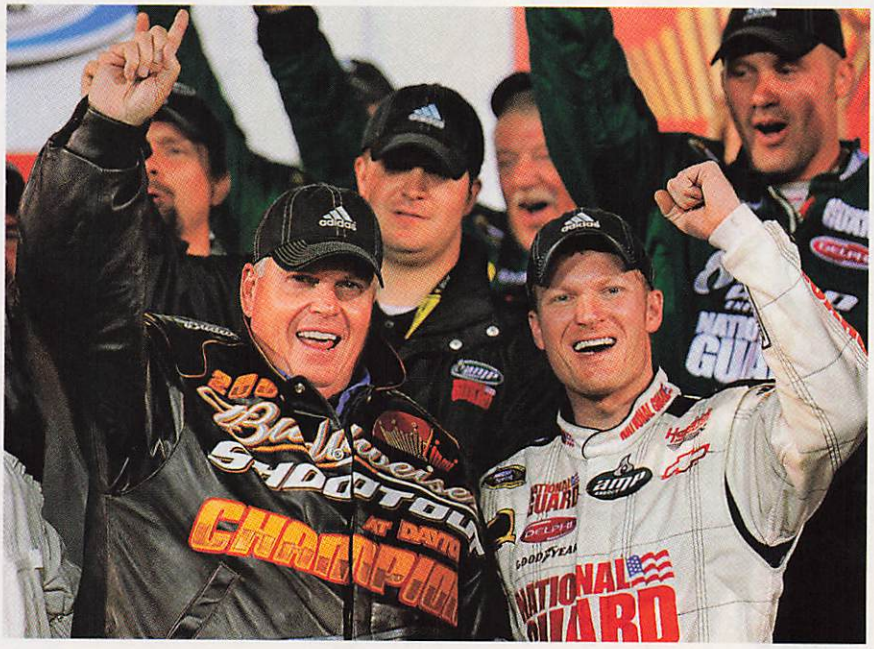
**HOT START** In his first race for Hendrick, Earnhardt delivered a victory in the Budweiser Shootout—and a celebratory burnout—last Saturday night at Daytona.

room at Hendrick Motorsports headquarters, a woman walking across the parking lot outside spots him through the floor-to-ceiling window. Wide-eyed, she mouths the words *Oh . . . my . . . God* and stops to watch the impromptu peep show. Another woman, standing inside the room with the near-naked race car driver, is getting weak in the knees. "You look *gooood*," she says. Even Earnhardt's silver-haired boss, Rick Hendrick, hovering near the doorway, takes one look at his newest driver—now down to a T-shirt and a pair of boxers printed with yellow rubber ducks—and says, "Man, you are unreal."

"You all want to know my secret and why I'm the most popular driver around?" shouts Earnhardt, smiling devilishly—the same wicked grin his old man used to flash when playing a prank. After waiting a beat he points to his lean, and white-as-baby-powder, body. "It's right here, *baaay-beee*! Right here!"

So, do you think the 33-year-old Earnhardt is enjoying himself these days? After the final race of 2007 Little E, winless in his last 62 starts, left the racing team founded by his father, Dale Earnhardt Inc. (DEI), to join Hendrick Motorsports, NASCAR's reigning powerhouse. Hendrick drivers won half of the 36 Nextel Cup races last season, and Jimmie Johnson *(opposite)* won his second straight points championship. But it isn't his new team's ruthless dominance that has Earnhardt's spirits soaring as he begins the second chapter of his stock car career; it's the fact that Rick Hendrick has already provided Earnhardt with something he has been searching for since Dale Sr. died in a crash on the last lap of the 2001 Daytona 500: An owner-driver connection that's deep and meaningful to both of them.

**PROMISE FULFILLED** Hendrick (left), who signed Little E to a "contract" at age 16, made the real deal with Earnhardt last June.



HENDRICK HAS ALREADY PROVIDED EARNHARDT WITH AN **OWNER-DRIVER CONNECTION** THAT'S DEEP AND MEANINGFUL TO BOTH OF THEM.

"This is a new day and a new era for me," Earnhardt says. "I can't believe how excited I am. I'm like the first one in and the last one to leave every day, and that sure as hell ain't like me. Something is happening to me, and it feels damn good. And I'll tell you something: It all starts with Rick."

KELLEY EARNHARDT was a mess of nerves. It was late last March, and she was scrambling through her little brother's kitchen in Mooresville, N.C., searching for drinking glasses and silverware. A distinguished guest was on his way to Junior's three-bedroom modular home for dinner that evening, but when Kelley opened the cabinets, she discovered that Dale Jr., who made an estimated $27.1 million last year in winnings and endorsements, was woefully ill-prepared for the occasion: Kelley found mason jars that served as glasses and plastic knives, forks and spoons.

"You've got to know this about Dale: He's a very simple guy," says Kelley, 35, Dale Jr.'s most trusted friend. "We joke that all he really needs is a tent, a computer and a T1 line, and he'd be content. But when Rick Hendrick comes to your house, you've got to set the table properly. Dale didn't have much, so I rushed back to my house to get some silverware and glasses."

The 58-year-old Hendrick was dropping by to discuss Earnhardt's racing future and to offer him the kind of guidance that his daddy—as Junior still refers to Big E—had provided. Though he wouldn't make an official announcement until more than two months later, Earnhardt had already decided that he didn't want to continue racing for DEI beyond 2007. Dale Sr. had hoped that his namesake would take over day-to-day operation of DEI at some point, but Junior believed he had to leave because of his fractured relationship with his stepmother, Teresa, who had assumed ownership of DEI after Dale Sr. passed away. (Teresa turned down SI's request for an interview.)

With his contract expiring at the end of '07, Little E had asked Teresa,

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who rarely attends races, for majority control of the company so he could try to build it into an elite organization. Though Junior had won Busch Series titles in 1998 and '99 with DEI and had 17 career victories at the Cup level, he had never seriously contended for a championship in eight years on the Cup circuit. His biggest complaint was that DEI didn't have the resources or engineering expertise that Hendrick, Roush Fenway Racing and Joe Gibbs Racing had. He drove mediocre equipment to top 10 finishes—nobody can ride the high line around the track like Little E—but he grew increasingly frustrated by engine failures (a Cup-high seven in '07) and lack of consistent speed.

So on May 10, after Teresa refused to sell him majority control of DEI, Junior held a press conference in Mooresville and, with misty eyes, told a media crowd of 200 that he was leaving the team. In an instant Earnhardt's search for a new ride became the story of the year in NASCAR. "I am scared s---less," Junior told a visitor 30 minutes after the press conference. "Me and Teresa do not see eye to eye. I wish we did, but we don't. . . . Man, I look at the fun that other drivers have with their owners. I want a guy who's going to be at the track and give me feedback. I want to feel really part of an entire organization."

Days later Earnhardt dispatched his cousin and longtime crew chief, Tony Eury Jr., to visit prospective teams, entrusting him with the decision on where they should race together in 2008 and beyond. Eury toured several race shops, including Gibbs and Richard Childress Racing, but it wasn't until he walked through the doors of Hendrick Motorsports and Rick guided him through the sprawling 600,000-square-foot facility that he found his vision of racing nirvana. Eury, who had spent two summers as a teenager sweeping floors at Hendrick 19 years earlier, was awed by the state-of-the-art equipment, the engineering support (Hendrick's 60 engineers are the most of any NASCAR organization) and the overall camaraderie of the 550 employees—none of which he'd had at DEI.

The next day Earnhardt called Eury and asked for a report: "How was it, man?"

"Well, it's the best, hands down," replied Eury. "Hendrick is where we need to be."

WORTH CANOY/ICON SMI

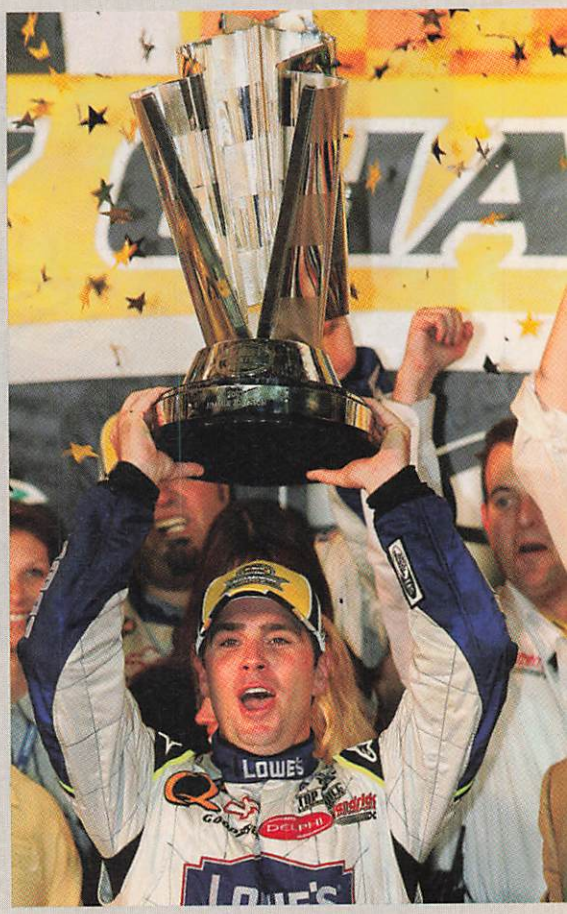
# Take It from the Top

## Riding high after two straight Cup titles, Jimmie Johnson isn't going to let a new teammate get in the way of a third

HE IS THE anti-Junior, a driver who has already proved he can win often and when it matters most. Since picking up his second straight Cup trophy last November, Jimmie Johnson has led a glamorous life. He has taken swings with the glitterati in his own celebrity golf tournament, partied with P. Diddy and Nick Lachey at the Super Bowl and chatted up the President at the White House. But the most exciting development during Johnson's off-season? Although a handful of his crew left, he retained the core members of his number 48 team, which means he is supremely positioned to become NASCAR's first three-peat champion since Cale Yarborough did it 30 years ago.

"I want to win three in a row, then look for a fourth and keep rolling if I can," says Johnson. "We've put pressure on the field to step it up to another level."

Indeed, Johnson and his crew chief, Chad Knaus, haven't finished lower than fifth in the standings since they first joined forces on the Cup circuit in 2002, and they've won more races (11) and had more top 10 finishes (28) in the Chase than any other driver–crew chief combo since the playoff format was adopted in 2004. Their knack for peaking at the right time—Knaus is careful not to overwork his crew in the summer months, in order to avoid burnout before the Chase in the fall—makes the Lowe's Chevy team the preseason favorite to hoist the Cup again in November. They got off to a good start on Sunday, qualifying on the pole for this weekend's Daytona 500.




**CHASE THIS** Johnson, winner of 10 races last year, was quick to master the Car of Tomorrow and the art of peaking in the 10-race postseason.

How difficult is it to beat Johnson? Not only is he as mistake-free on the race track as any driver in the sport—"I think I've seen Jimmie screw up twice in the last three years, which is really saying something," says one longtime spotter—but he also excels in the Car of Tomorrow, which will be used full time in 2008. In 16 CoT starts last season, Johnson had the most wins (five) and the second-best average finish (6.9) of any driver on the Cup circuit, behind Hendrick teammate Jeff Gordon (5.5). Even scarier: The 32-year-old Johnson is entering the prime of his racing career. Dale Earnhardt Sr. and Darrell Waltrip, after all, didn't win their second championships until they were 35; Yarborough was 38 when he got that third straight title in 1978.

"I feel like we're getting better every season we're together," says Knaus. "I honestly believe we haven't reached our potential yet, not even close." —*L.A.*

And with that, Earnhardt was determined to honor a commitment he'd made more than 15 years earlier.

IT BEGAN as a joke. On a summer afternoon in 1991, Little E was lounging in a motor home parked in the infield at Heartland Park in Topeka, Kans., when Rick Hendrick strolled through the door. The 16-year-old Earnhardt had been shadowing Ken Schrader, a Cup veteran and longtime family friend, in the days leading up to a race in the ARCA series, and after Hendrick was introduced to the skinny teenager, the owner asked him, "Do you want to race for me someday?"

Dale Jr. excitedly nodded his head, and Hendrick reached for a napkin, drew up a two-line "contract" on it and had the boy scribble his signature. Hendrick knew this playful deal would raise the ire of Little E's father. "When I mentioned it to Dale, he just gave me that look of his," says Hendrick, smiling with the recollection. "He knew his son was going to drive for him, not me."

Though Dale Sr. and Hendrick were rivals at the racetrack—Big E drove for Childress and annually dueled Hendrick's Jeff Gordon for championships—the two were close friends. Hendrick had offered Dale Sr. a ride in the mid-1980s (he politely refused), and the two nearly started a sportswear business together in the late '90s. One of the last conversations Hendrick had with Dale Sr. focused on the one thing that mattered most to the Intimidator: his youngest son.

"My wife, Linda, and I were talking to Dale Sr. and he said that Dale Jr. was a good boy," recalls Hendrick. "He said Junior was good with his money, that he was tight as hell. And Linda replied that we pray for him, which prompted Dale Sr. to say, 'Good. He needs it.' "

Growing up around racetracks, Dale Jr. befriended Hendrick's only son, Ricky, who was six years younger. As Little E progressed through the racing ranks, he frequently spent time at Ricky's condominium in Charlotte. The two grew so close that they started joking that one day Dale Jr. would drive for Ricky, who stood to inherit the Hendrick Motorsports empire. Ricky even informed his father that he had a plan to lure his friend to the Hendrick team.

Then in 2004, on a gray October morning in southern Virginia, a twin-engine plane owned by Hendrick Motorsports and headed for a race in Martinsville crashed into fog-shrouded Bull Mountain. Among the 10 people killed were Ricky; Hendrick's brother, John; and John's daughters, Kimberly and Jennifer. For several months Hendrick, tormented by the death of so many he loved, mostly stayed away from racing.

When Hendrick did return to the track, Earnhardt approached him and Linda on pit road before a race in Charlotte, softly telling them, "Ricky was a fine boy. A real fine boy." Because it lurks on every turn at every track, death is rarely discussed in NASCAR circles. Though it is a topic that Earnhardt and Hendrick seldom delve into, the tragedies that have so profoundly affected the driver and the owner formed a deeper bond between them.

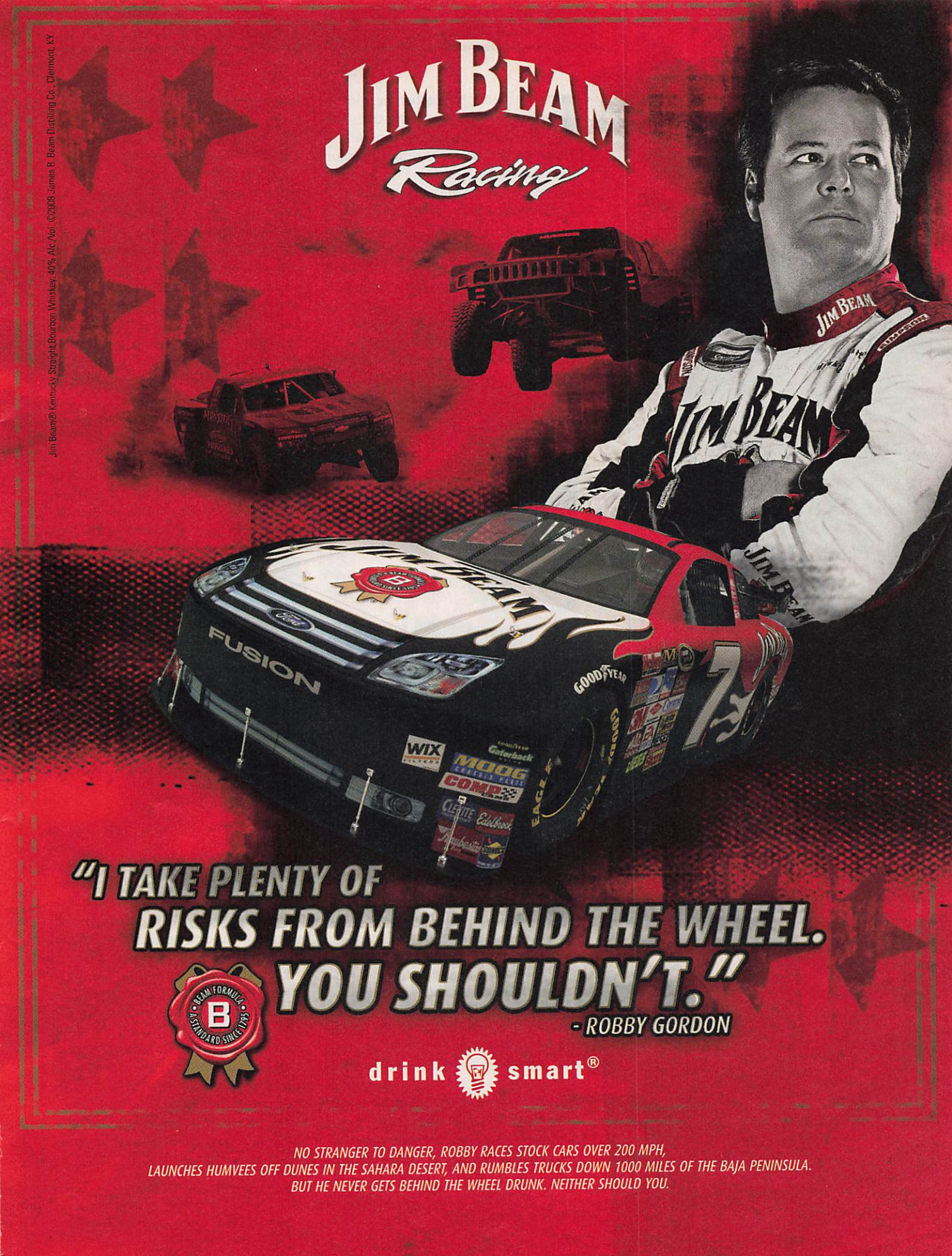
"We have some things in common, unfortunate things," says Earnhardt. "People will say that Rick will take the place of my daddy or I will take the place of Ricky, but it's not really that. What's happening is that we both understand what the other one has lost. Without using words we know that we've each dealt with some terrible things. And this has built up an incredible trust between us."

Says Hendrick, "One of the things Dale Jr. and I share is that the plans of our lives haven't worked out. Ricky was supposed to take over my business, and Dale Jr. was supposed to take over his dad's. It's a void and a tremendous hurt. But when your world changes, you have to move on, and both of us are doing that—and now we're doing it together."

**ON THE LINE** Earnhardt, who went low in his new number 88 Chevy to pass Michael Waltrip in the Shootout, has the horsepower he needed.

"I UNDERSTAND THAT I HAVE **NO MORE EXCUSES**," SAYS EARNHARDT. "NOW I'LL HAVE THE BEST EQUIPMENT. IT'S TIME FOR ME TO START WINNING."

JASON SMITH/GETTY IMAGES FOR NASCAR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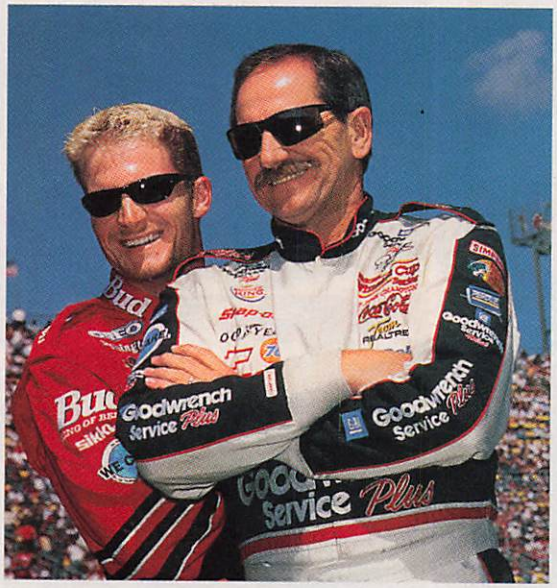
IT'S A breezy November morning in South Florida, the palm trees are swaying and, for the first time, all the Hendrick drivers are together: Gordon, Johnson, Casey Mears and the new guy, Junior. Earnhardt had signed a multiyear contract last June to drive the number 88 Chevy (replacing Kyle Busch in the Hendrick stable) and the four teammates are posed for a photographer at Homestead-Miami Speedway two days before the final race of the '07 season. But before they flash their best sponsor-friendly smiles, Gordon can't help but needle Earnhardt. "Hey, guys," Gordon says to Johnson and Mears, "should we teach him the secret handshake or not?"—a joke that sets off a round of laughter.

**SON'S UP** Dale Sr. (right, in 2000) envisioned Junior taking over DEI some day. After the father's death Hendrick provided a new home.




In fact, Junior should have little trouble fitting in at Hendrick. He was close friends with the other three drivers before joining the team. And Eury spent the final 10 weeks of last season shadowing other Hendrick crew chiefs, learning the team's lexicon and how its Chevys are set up. Earnhardt's driving style closely mirrors Johnson's—they both like loose race cars and tend to use the brake less than most drivers—so Eury paid particular attention to every adjustment Johnson's crew chief, Chad Knaus, made to the champion's car. "Being at Hendrick at the end of the season gave me a chance to get up to speed on most things," says Eury. "There's definitely going to be an adjustment period, but we'll be competitive early. Real competitive."

If Junior starts winning races again, and the consensus in the garage is that he'll reach Victory Lane more than once in '08, the big payoff will go to NASCAR. Television ratings and attendance have slipped two years in a row in the Cup series, which has Sprint replacing Nextel as title sponsor this year. But the attraction to Earnhardt is so strong—he has been voted most popular driver six years in a row by stock car fans—that he could have the same impact on NASCAR's ratings that Tiger Woods has on the PGA's.

"Dale Jr. is easily a top five talent," says one longtime NASCAR spotter. "Everyone in the garage is expecting him to win a ton of races now that he's with Hendrick, and he should contend for the championship as early as this season."

"I understand that I have no more excuses," says Earnhardt. "Now I'll have the best equipment and the best people behind me. It's time for me to start winning. I do know my daddy would be damn envious of me right now."

BACK IN the small conference room at Hendrick Motorsports, Little E's clothes are off—and his new driver's suit is on, for the first time. "The arms are too tight," Earnhardt says to the tailor, who will be making the adjustments. "And bring the [collar] zipper down one inch."

Rick Hendrick is among the half-dozen people admiring Earnhardt in his new green-and-white uniform. It's been a long, pain-filled road for both of them, but finally the two most powerful figures in NASCAR are united. And whatever happens in this Sunday's 50th running of the Daytona 500—a debut victory for the 88 car would not be a shock—the future is filled with promise and good feelings. □

GEORGE TIEDEMANN/NEWSPORT

# It's All About The Driving

SAM SHARPE

WITH A NEW CUP SEASON REVVING UP THIS WEEKEND, NASCAR'S "BACK TO BASICS" CAMPAIGN COMES DOWN TO ONE FACTOR: **THE MEN BEHIND THE WHEEL** (AS IT SHOULD) **BY MARK BEECH**

AFTER THE green flag drops for the 50th running of the Daytona 500 on Sunday, the race, in terms of its size, scope, sophistication and, of course, speed, will be light years beyond anything the first participants could have imagined on Feb. 22, 1959. Most of the changes in NASCAR over the years have been organic to competition, as teams and drivers have taken advantage of technological advancements to go ever faster. But in the last five seasons the folks who run the Cup series have instituted several high-profile adjustments—some intended to improve safety, but most aimed at increasing the audience—that have radically altered NASCAR's look and feel. After two years of falling television ratings and declining attendance, it's fair to ask, Might the changes be going too far?

Brian France, CEO of NASCAR, seemed to acknowledge as much last month, when he delivered his state-of-the-sport speech to the media in Charlotte. He announced that there were no more changes on the horizon and that the goal for 2008 was "getting back to basics." (Well, Sprint did replace Nextel as title sponsor of the Cup series.) That should be a relief to hard-core fans—i.e., those with a grasp of stock car racing deeper than being able to quote from *Talladega Nights*—who have been put off by all the recent adjustments. The Chase for the Cup playoff format, introduced in 2004, has had the unhappy consequence of rendering the last two months of the season meaningless for any driver not among the 12 who qualify, a disastrous circumstance when a major draw misses the Chase (such as Dale Earnhardt Jr. last season and Tony Stewart in 2006). As well, the debut last year of NASCAR's first foreign manufacturer, Toyota, wasn't popular with many fans who loved Cup racing's devotion to

**HOME COOKING** For the last half century, the Daytona 500 has set the table for the racing season. NASCAR hopes fans are still hungry.

a red-white-and-blue lineup of Chevy, Dodge and Ford. And the poor-handling Car of Tomorrow—now NASCAR's car of *today*—with its rigid design template, has done away with almost all of the significant differences among manufacturers.

"We're at a turning point in this sport," says Humpy Wheeler, the president and G.M. of Lowe's Motor Speedway in Concord, N.C., and NASCAR's most powerful promoter. "We need to make this car of today work. We've got the finest drivers in the world driving these race cars. All they need to be able to do is get the car into the corner and make it work."

Those drivers remain NASCAR's great-

**THE WORD FROM ON HIGH** In his state-of-the-sport speech, CEO France stressed NASCAR's commitment to the longtime fan.

est resource, and the powers that be in the sport would be wise to put the focus on them in the effort to win back fans. There are still plenty of drivers—Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson and Stewart have reached Victory Lane a combined 43 times in the last three years—who race all-out every weekend, who run their cars, as Dale Earnhardt used to say, "wide f-----' open." And there's the prospect of exciting racing ahead. Will Johnson complete a historic Cup three-peat in 2008 while fighting off even stronger challenges from his teammates? Can the American manufacturers continue to outrun Toyota, who with its move to Joe Gibbs Racing may be poised to enjoy its first Cup success? And how will fans and established Cup drivers take to the influx of open-wheel and international talent that is flowing into the series?

These are questions that should galvanize even the most jaded fans. On the eve of the Great American Race, it's as good a time as any for NASCAR to quit fidgeting, put the cars on the track and turn them loose. After all, it's worked before. □

# Scouting Reports

On Sunday at Daytona the nine-month, 36-race charge for the Sprint Cup gets started. Here's how the top teams stack up in their all-out quest for the checkered flag

Gordon

## Hendrick Motorsports

THIS ORGANIZATION has it all: talent at the wheel, expertise atop the pit box and unmatched resources. It's easy to believe that Hendrick will again be the juggernaut it was in 2007, when its cars won 18 races and Jimmie Johnson and Jeff Gordon went one-two in the standings. New to the stable is Dale Earnhardt Jr., who replaces Kyle Busch (now with Joe Gibbs Racing). Little E brings crew chief Tony Eury Jr. with him, and their number 88 team will share facilities with the team of Casey Mears and crew chief Alan Gustafson, an arrangement that should help both drivers. *—Lars Anderson*

| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| **JIMMIE JOHNSON** | 32 | 7TH | 1ST |
| *The reigning Cup champ has matured as a driver to the point where he has no weakness. He's the man to beat.* | | | |
| **JEFF GORDON** | 36 | 16TH | 2ND |
| *He had more top 10s last year (30) than in any other season of his storied career. Crew chief Steve Letarte wants victories this season. Expect a strong run at a fifth Cup.* | | | |
| **CASEY MEARS** | 29 | 6TH | 15TH |
| *He had five top fives and an average finish of 18.9 last year—mediocrity that, if repeated, could leave him looking for a new ride in '09.* | | | |
| **DALE EARNHARDT JR.** | 33 | 9TH | 16TH |
| *Winless in his last 62 races for DEI, Junior should snap that streak within the first four weeks of the season. His driving style suits the Hendrick setups.* | | | |

**ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON AN OPPOSING TEAM SIZES UP HENDRICK**

"I'M STILL amazed at how well **Jimmie Johnson** and **Jeff Gordon** *(left)* work together—it says a lot about Jeff that he's kept communicating with Jimmie even though Jimmie is winning the titles. . . . They will be the two guys to beat again. . . . You'd like to think that Hendrick's dominance won't last forever, but it sure seems like it will right now. . . . They tested fast at Daytona, so I expect all four Hendrick guys to be in contention for a win in the 500."

**6** **CHASE races that Johnson (four) and Gordon (two) combined to win out of the 10 in the Cup postseason.**

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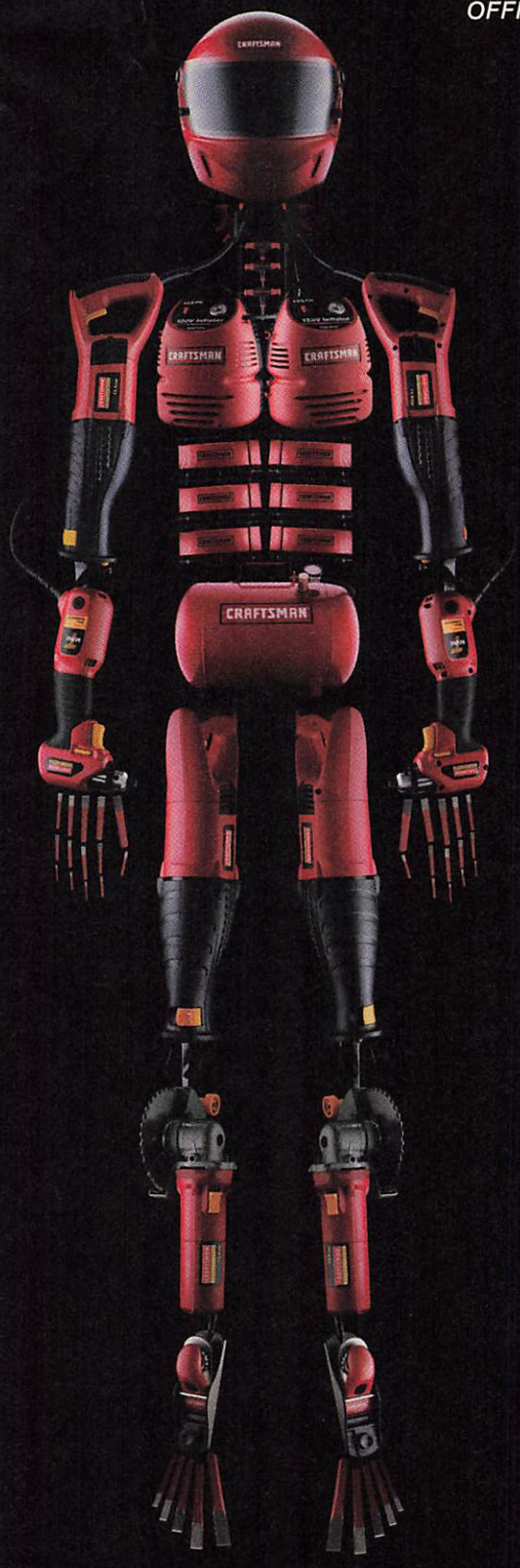


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# The Silent Partner

by S.L. Price

ON FEB. 5 a court in Hangzhou sentenced dissident journalist Lu Gengsong to four years in prison for "inciting subversion of state power" with his critical essays about the ruling Communist Party. Lu responded by yelling, "Long live democracy!" Then he was taken away.

It is six months before the start of the Beijing Games—China's coming-out party—and though they knew that Olympic officials and the world's media would be watching, the Chinese authorities railroaded Lu anyway. Maybe I shouldn't be shocked, but I am. China's pledges to respect and, as one Beijing bid executive put it, "enhance" human rights gave the International Olympic Committee moral cover in July 2001, when it chose Beijing over Toronto. That was the deal: For its five-ringed prize, the Chinese government would show that it had a conscience.

**The IOC has formally assessed the progress of preparations in Beijing without once assessing the "enhancing" of human rights in China.**

Two years ago at the Turin Winter Games, I sat in an office with IOC president Jacques Rogge, a former surgeon and Olympic yachtsman refreshingly lacking in his predecessor's oily self-importance. Beijing's bid had been approved three days before Rogge took office, but he was fully on board, believing that the Games would transform China. He told me what he said to Beijing: "The values of the IOC are full respect [for] human rights. We ask you to do the best efforts so that leading up to the Games, during the Games and after the Games, you would have the best possible human rights record." Rogge stared at me across the table. "They received the message," he said.

Clearly not. In what Amnesty International USA and Human Rights Watch describe as a growing crackdown on critics due largely to the government's heightened sensitivity as the Games approach, another prominent dissident, Hu Jia, was jailed in December. China has more journalists (25, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists) and cyber-dissidents (49, according to Reporters Without Borders) in prison than any other nation in the world. As part of its bid the regime made a big show of promising foreign media "complete freedom to report" throughout the country, but watchdog groups cite continued harassment; last month stone-throwing goons reportedly hired by local authorities barred a German camera crew from meeting with the wife of an imprisoned human rights activist in Shandong.

The IOC, meanwhile, has been conspicuously silent. Asked last week by e-mail if Rogge had rethought what he told me in Turin, he responded with a bloodless, nine-sentence statement emphasizing "quiet diplomacy" and the belief that "history will tell that more good than bad has resulted from hosting the Olympic Games in Beijing." The words *human rights* were not mentioned.

Part of this, perhaps, stems from a fading hope that the IOC can still influence China the way it did South Korea, when giving the 1988 Summer Games to Seoul spurred the country toward democracy. But the difference is huge: Tiny South Korea yearned to become a free-market player and faced intense international pressure to reform; five months before the '88 Olympics, the nation staged the most successful free election in its history.

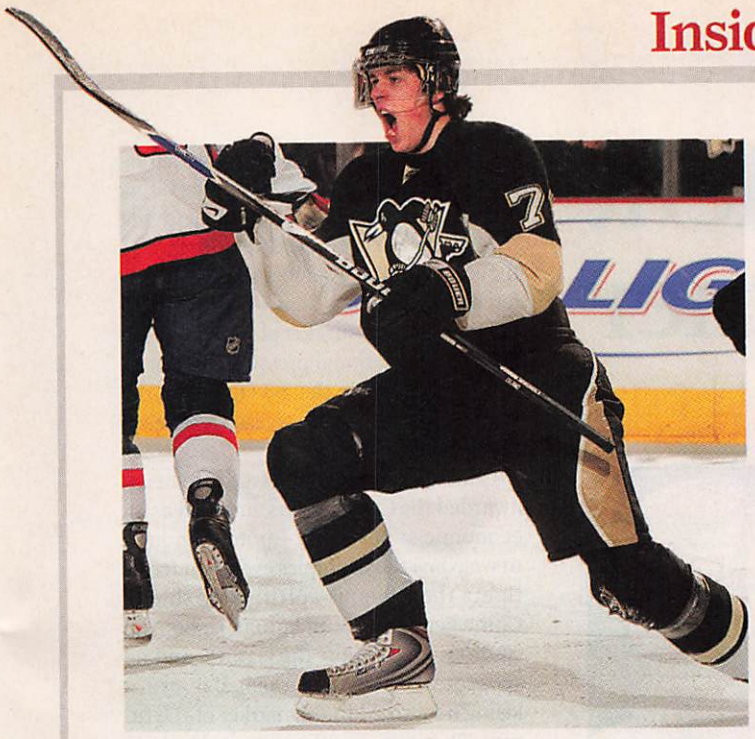
China? In the seven years since being awarded the Games it has emerged as an economic superpower—potent enough to welcome the Olympics even as it freely flouts the Olympic spirit. Why should China keep its vow on human rights? No country will boycott the Games, and no sponsor will pull out of them, if it means losing a foothold in the market of the future. That may sound too cynical by half, except that on Sunday the British Olympic committee announced the insertion of a clause in its athletes' contract that prevents "comment on any politically sensitive issues," only to remove it a day later under worldwide media pressure. Olympic committees in New Zealand and Rogge's native Belgium have already forbidden their athletes from giving political opinions during the Games.

Maybe each nation chose on its own to truckle. Or perhaps there's been a truckle-down effect from the IOC: Since 2002 it has formally assessed the progress of Beijing's preparations without once assessing the "enhancing" of human rights in China. Has the IOC gone beyond enabling? If Chinese dissidents and journalists keep going to jail, "and the International Olympic Committee is keeping their mouth shut and looking the other way? They are the ones responsible," says T. Kumar of Amnesty International USA. "Both are on trial. Not only China: The IOC's credibility is on the line."

That's why Rogge must speak out. These Olympics are massively popular in China, and its leaders fear any loss of face. All he needs to do is say two sentences in public: *This is not acceptable. Live up to your pledge.* With that, the IOC stops legitimizing a nightmare. With that, the shame is China's alone. □

*Full disclosure*: SI has licensing agreements with *SI China* and with the IOC for the Beijing Olympics.

ILLUSTRATION BY KEITH WITMER



# Subbing for Sid

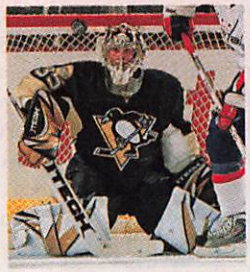
## With Captain Crosby on the shelf, the Penguins got a boost from star apparent Evgeni Malkin and soldiered on

WHILE LIFE without Sidney has gone swimmingly in Pittsburgh, the Penguins' reluctant general manager, Ray Shero, says only, "we're keeping our head above water." They were 6-3-2 sans Sidney Crosby through Sunday, a statistic that has been religiously noted in Pittsburgh since he sustained a high-right-ankle sprain during a Jan. 18 game. Similar bookkeeping occurs in places such as Colorado, where the Avalanche had gone 4-3-2 without top forwards Joe Sakic, Ryan Smyth and Paul Stastny, but the absence of Crosby qualifies as a special case because, well, Crosby is special. Before his injury the reigning MVP had scored 63 points, tied for the league lead, and had helped carry Pittsburgh to nine wins in 10 games.

Although Crosby's 21 minutes of ice time are being spread around—veteran right wing Petr Sykora has upped his average by nearly four minutes, to 19:22, while scoring 13 points in the 11 games—the heavy lifting of Pittsburgh's offense has been shouldered by second-year center Evgeni Malkin. Malkin can't understudy Crosby in a Gatorade commercial (he speaks no English), but the 21-year-old Russian is doing a boffo job on the ice. After averaging 1.2 points per game B.C. (Before Crosby went down), he has increased his pace to 1.9, including a two-goal, three-point game against Washington on Jan. 21, when he matched Alexander Ovechkin in a sublime duel.

For a few games in January, Malkin, nominally the Penguins' second-line center, had played on Crosby's left flank and clicked wondrously. Yet the return to his natural position has hardly hurt him, even though he attracts every shutdown defense pair and checking line. "I don't know how much he enjoys [the spotlight], but he's good enough to handle it," Shero says of Malkin, who was picked second in the 2004 draft, one spot behind Ovechkin.

**INTO THE VOID** Malkin (left) is surging as a top center; goalie Conklin saves the day.



If Malkin's star turn—his recent play has made him a Hart Trophy candidate—is no surprise, goalie Ty Conklin's is shocking. The 31-year-old journeyman was earning $100,000 in the minors when he got called back to the NHL because of a different high-ankle sprain, this one to Pittsburgh starter Marc-André Fleury, who was hurt on Dec. 6. In Conklin's first appearance, relieving Dany Sabourin to start the third period on Dec. 11, he was torched for three goals on 15 shots by the Flyers. Oilers G.M. Kevin Lowe and Blue Jackets G.M. Scott Howson called the next day to reassure Shero that the goalie was a battler (Edmonton and Columbus were stops along Conklin's circuitous professional route), and Conklin quickly proved them right, winning his first nine starts. He was 14-3-3 with a .929 save percentage through Sunday.

"Sometimes a goalie of that type will go on a run like Alex Auld did in Boston [three straight road wins in December], but usually it's four, six or 10 games," an Eastern Conference scout says. "Conklin has kept it up."

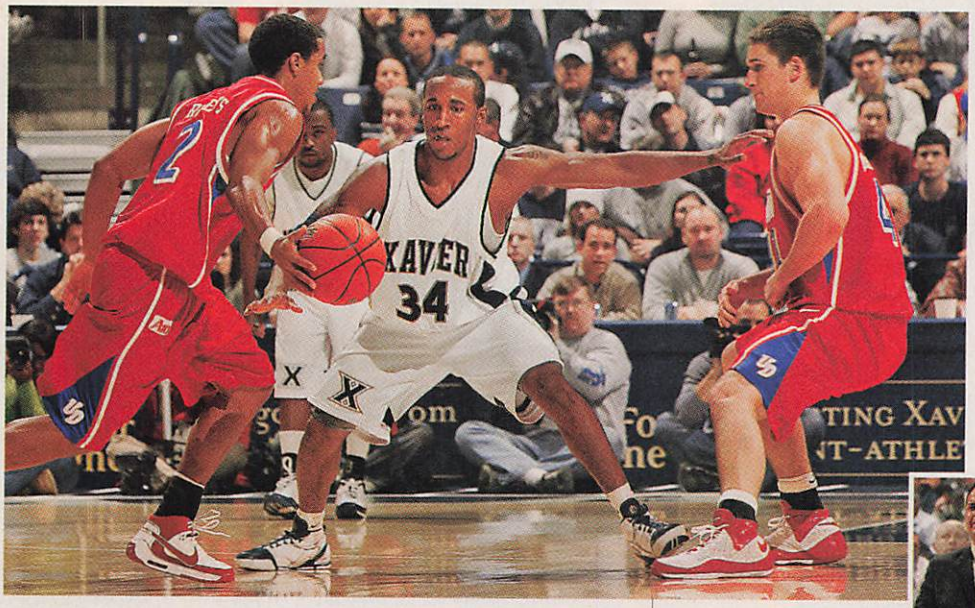
Penguins players say that the best way to compensate for the loss of Crosby's offense is to clamp down on defense, and lately Conklin has been cocooned by a more accountable team. In his last eight games B.C., the goalie faced an average of 36 shots. In the absence of Crosby—who is skating with the team and is due back by mid-March—that average had dipped to fewer than 30. Says Conklin, who will have to share the net when Fleury returns later this month, "With guys having to take more responsibility, playing without Sid might help us down the road." □

DAVE SANDFORD/NHLI/GETTY IMAGES (MALKIN, CONKLIN); GLENN JAMES/NHLI/GETTY IMAGES (RIBEIRO)

## Pierre McGuire's In the Crease

When Stars G.M. **Doug Armstrong** was fired on Nov. 13 after five years in that job, Dallas was 7-7-3. Through Sunday the team was 34-20-5—without having made a significant roster change. Five current Stars were drafted under Armstrong, who also acquired top scorer **Mike Ribeiro** *(right)* from Montreal (for **Janne Niinimaa**, who's out of the NHL) and 20-goal man **Niklas Hagman** from Florida (for a seventh-round draft pick). Armstrong should be on the short list of any team looking for a G.M. . . . The Bruins have had the league's second-fewest power plays largely because, lacking big forwards, they don't spend a lot of time in the offensive zone. The solution? Coach **Claude Julien** wants Boston to cycle the puck better and thus force opponents to defend more intensely near the net, which should cause them to commit more penalties.

**ONLY AT SI.COM** Michael Farber's news and analysis column, On the Fly.



**LATE BLOOMER** Even Miller (inset) was surprised Burrell blossomed into a force on D.

# Best Defense

## Now that its top gunner has diversified his game, stingy Xavier specializes in shutting down opposing scorers

THIS SEASON *X* marks the spot where top shooters miss their target. Whenever one of the nation's premier scorers goes up against No. 12 Xavier (20–4 through Sunday), he inevitably winds up having a subpar game *(box)*. Though the Musketeers have a plethora of offensive weapons (six players—guards Stanley Burrell, Drew Lavender and B.J. Raymond, and forwards C.J. Anderson, Derrick Brown and Josh Duncan—average double digits in scoring), it's their lockdown defense that at week's end had propelled them to a 6–1 record against teams ranked in the RPI top 50. "There are nights when the offense comes and goes," says Xavier coach Sean Miller, "but that tough defense is what has to be our constant."

Of the high-profile victims, all but Kansas State forward Michael Beasley were the defensive assignment of one particular Musketeer: Burrell. The senior's transformation into what Massachusetts coach Travis Ford has called "the best defensive player in the [Atlantic 10]" would have seemed implausible earlier in his career. As a freshman and sophomore the Indianapolis native was almost exclusively a three-point gunner, leading the team in scoring both seasons. "I just wanted to score points," says Burrell. "I couldn't have cared less about defense."

During Burrell's sophomore year, "I told him he had great potential as a defender," says assistant James Whitford. "He looked at me like I was speaking Spanish." But when Burrell's outside shot deserted him last season (he made just 5 of 26 treys during one five-game stretch), he began dedicating himself to other aspects of his game. "Without a lot of people recognizing it," says Miller, "Stanley became more well-rounded."

Even Miller was surprised, however, to see Burrell take over as Xavier's primary stopper, a role previously held by forward Justin Cage. It's now a given that the 6' 3" Burrell will take on the opponent's top weapon, unless he's a post player like Beasley. "Every time I have a big-name matchup, I take it personally," says Burrell. The day before facing Dayton's Brian Roberts—who has scored 30 or more points three times this season—Whitford gave Burrell a DVD of every shot Roberts had taken in his previous eight games. "He called me at home that night with questions," says Whitford. The next night Roberts didn't make a field goal until only 8:40 remained in the first half, after Burrell had gone to the bench with his second foul.

But Burrell doesn't do it alone. "Our defensive strategy requires players to depend on each other," says Whitford. "We have a triangle around the ball at all times." Such was the case in the second round of last year's NCAA tournament, when a trio of seemingly undersized Xavier defenders hounded Ohio State 7-footer Greg Oden, who committed four turnovers and fouled out.

The ninth-seeded Musketeers were seconds from toppling the top-seeded Buckeyes in that game before Xavier gave up a long three-pointer and fell in overtime. If it keeps up its current pace, this year's squad figures to enter the tournament with both a higher seed and higher aspirations. "If we're defending well," says Whitford, "we're difficult to beat." □

## Showstoppers

Xavier has shut down a number of top opposing scorers this season:

- On Nov. 24 the Musketeers held Indiana star freshman guard Eric Gordon, who is averaging 21.3 points a game, to 4-of-12 shooting in an upset of the Hoosiers.
- On Dec. 22 Tennessee senior guard Chris Lofton *(right)*, who led the SEC in scoring last season with 20.8 points per game, shot 3 of 12 in a Vols win.
- On Dec. 31 another freshman phenom, Kansas State forward Michael Beasley (25.2 points per game) scored a season-low five points in a Xavier rout.
- On Jan. 24 Dayton senior guard Brian Roberts, the leading candidate for Atlantic 10 player of the year, had his lowest-scoring game in two years (five points) in a Flyers loss. —S.M.

AL TIELEMANS (2); JIM BROWN/US PRESSWIRE (LOFTON)

## College Basketball

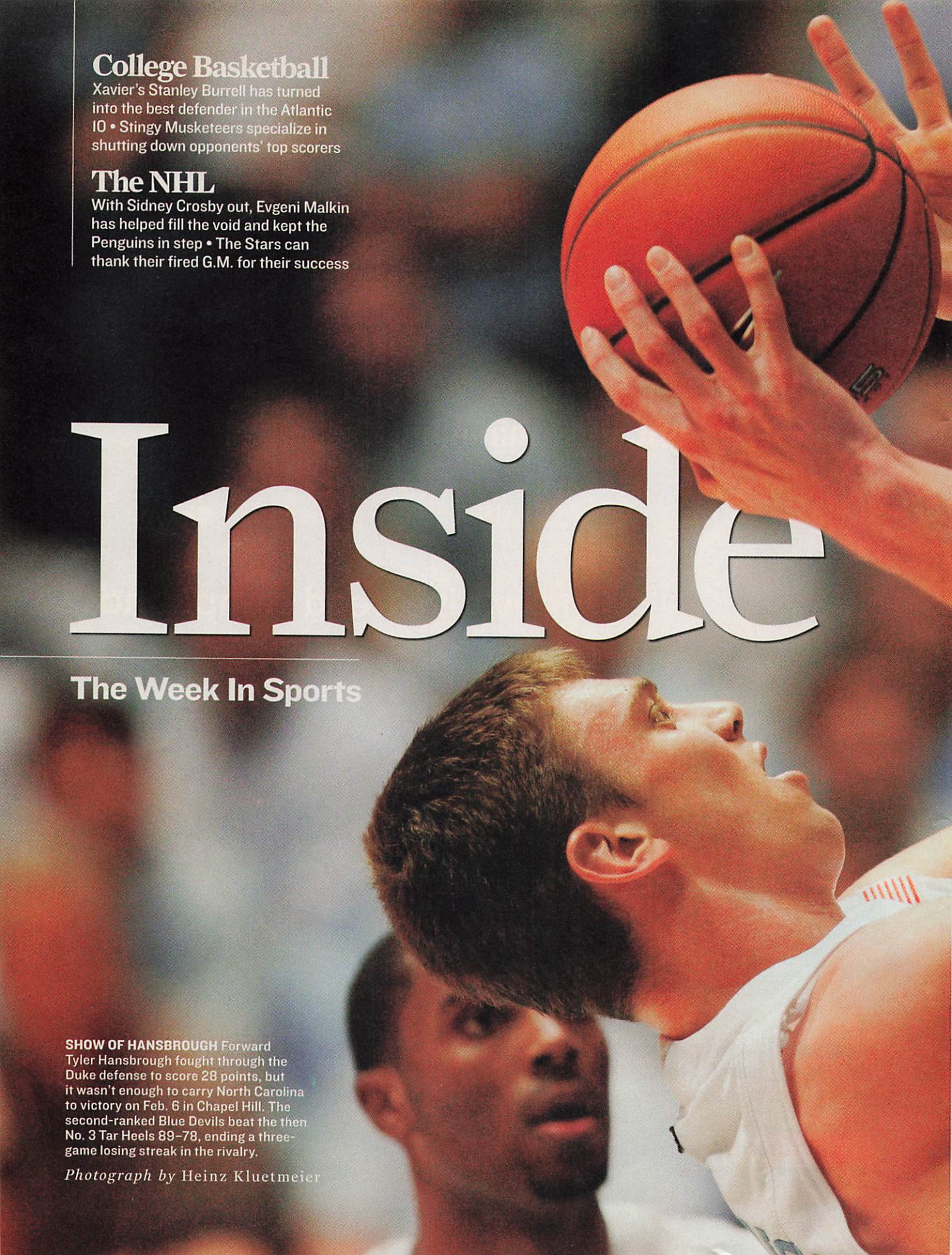
Xavier's Stanley Burrell has turned into the best defender in the Atlantic 10 • Stingy Musketeers specialize in shutting down opponents' top scorers

## The NHL

With Sidney Crosby out, Evgeni Malkin has helped fill the void and kept the Penguins in step • The Stars can thank their fired G.M. for their success

# Inside

## The Week In Sports



**SHOW OF HANSBROUGH** Forward Tyler Hansbrough fought through the Duke defense to score 28 points, but it wasn't enough to carry North Carolina to victory on Feb. 6 in Chapel Hill. The second-ranked Blue Devils beat the then No. 3 Tar Heels 89–78, ending a three-game losing streak in the rivalry.

*Photograph by* Heinz Kluetmeier

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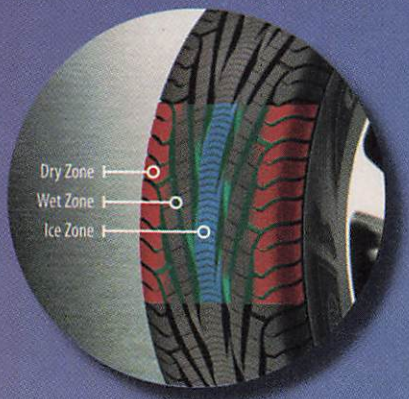


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GOODYEAR
Get there



Vickers

Gordon

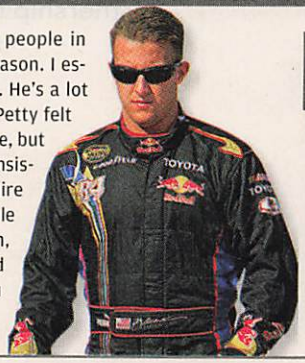
## Best of the Rest

PETTY ENTERPRISES hasn't won a race since 1999, and owner Richard Petty had to do something dramatic to turn things around. So in the off-season he moved the operation from his tiny family shop in Level Cross, N.C., to a sprawling complex in Mooresville, N.C., the hub of the sport. Petty hopes the new digs will help him recruit top talent, and it's already working out that way: He lured Jeff Meendering, the former car chief for Jeff Gordon, to be crew chief for Bobby Labonte. . . . Another underfunded team that will struggle to finish in the top 20 in points this season is Robby Gordon Motorsports. Gordon is the only full-time independent owner-driver in the series, and while he had two top 10 runs last season, he also finished 30th or worse 13 times. . . . Red Bull Racing Team, on the other hand, is flush with cash and has the man, Brian Vickers, who led more laps (106) than any other Toyota driver in 2007. Still, because their outfits are inexperienced, Vickers and teammate AJ Allmendinger are at least two years away from competing for a spot in the Chase. —L.A.

| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| **< ROBBY GORDON** | **39** | **10TH** | **26TH** |
| *A hard charger every time he takes the green flag, this road-course expert is always a threat to win at Watkins Glen and Infineon Raceway.* | | | |
| **JOE NEMECHEK** | **44** | **15TH** | **37TH** |
| *Front Row Joe is back with a full-time ride, and with his team, Furniture Row Racing, running Hendrick engines, he could occasionally contend.* | | | |
| **< BRIAN VICKERS** | **24** | **5TH** | **38TH** |
| *A year after finishing 15th in points, he was hobbled by Toyota's growing pains and failed to qualify for 13 races in '07. Look for him to rebound.* | | | |
| **< AJ ALLMENDINGER** | **26** | **2ND** | **43RD** |
| *Despite running poorly in qualifying, he pulled out three finishes of 18th or better. As he matures, his finishes should improve.* | | | |
| **KYLE PETTY** | **47** | **29TH** | **35TH** |
| *Winless in his last 391 starts, the son of the King will run a limited (30 or 31 races) schedule as part of his transition to the broadcast booth.* | | | |
| **< BOBBY LABONTE** | **43** | **16TH** | **18TH** |
| *The '00 points champion had only three top 10s last year, his fewest since '94, but remains a resourceful racer who can rise to the occasion.* | | | |

### ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON AN OPPOSING TEAM SIZES UP THE BEST OF THE REST

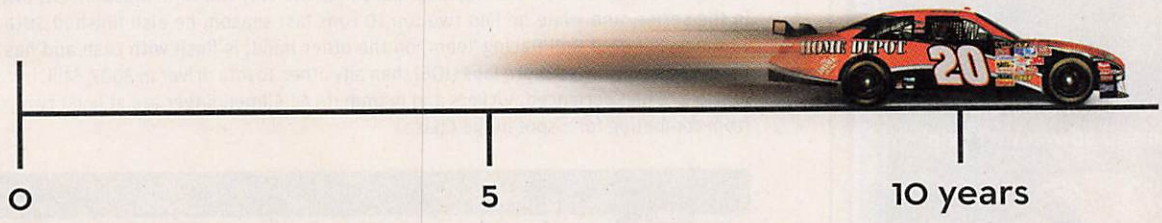
"I THINK Red Bull has a lot of good people in place, and they could surprise this season. I especially like **AJ Allmendinger** *(right)*. He's a lot better than he showed last year. . . . Petty felt they had to move to be able to compete, but they just don't have the talent to consistently run well. . . . You've got to admire **Robby Gordon**'s tenacity. It's impossible to be competitive as a single-car team, but he's out there doing his thing, and every once in a while he'll surprise you and run well."



**5**

**BEST finish by a Red Bull Racing Team driver in '07—Vickers at Charlotte. The team had four other top 10s, all by Vickers.**

FROM TOP: SAM SHARPE (LEFT); NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK; ALAN SMITH/ASP/CAL SPORT MEDIA; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK (3); TODD WARSHAW/GETTY IMAGES FOR NASCAR

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Montoya

## Chip Ganassi Racing

IN HIS first Cup season Juan Pablo Montoya won a race, was 2007 Rookie of the Year and, with his aggressive driving, made enemies in the garage and in the stands. How overzealous was he? Montoya spun out teammate Scott Pruett to win a Busch Series race and crashed into Kevin Harvick at Watkins Glen. Yet there's no denying that Montoya—the '00 Indy 500 champ and a seven-time winner in Formula One—is a unique talent, and this season he'll challenge to become the first Ganassi driver to qualify for the Chase. The Montoya experiment went so well, in fact, that Chip Ganassi signed another Indy winner, '07 champ Dario Franchitti, to a multiyear contract. —L.A.

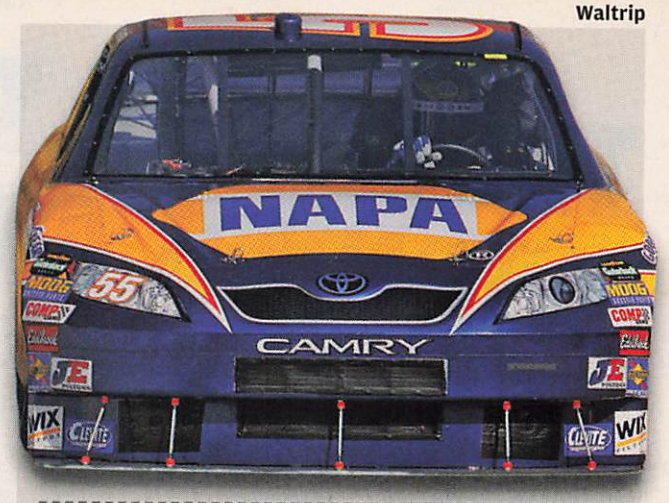
| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| < JUAN PABLO MONTOYA | 32 | 2ND | 20TH |
| *In late January he ran the fastest lap on the final day of testing at Las Vegas, which bodes well for his chances on intermediate tracks this season.* | | | |
| < DARIO FRANCHITTI | 34 | ROOKIE | — |
| *The '07 IndyCar Series champ and native Scot has never raced full time in a stock car, and adjusting to the heavier vehicle will take time.* | | | |
| REED SORENSON | 22 | 3RD | 22ND |
| *After taking fifth at the Brickyard, Sorenson had only five more top 15s and failed to finish higher than 25th in his last seven starts.* | | | |

### ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON AN OPPOSING TEAM SIZES UP GANASSI

"YOU'VE GOT to love the international flavor of this team, but you've also got to remember that there aren't many **Juan Pablo Montoyas** in the world. I don't think you can expect **Dario Franchitti** to have the kind of success that Montoya had last season. . . . This is a key year for **Reed Sorenson** *(left)*. He's got to show that he belongs at this level or he's not going to last much longer. . . . Montoya should be a threat to make the Chase, but he's going to have to knock off one of the top guys to make it in, and that won't be easy."

**11**
**HIGHEST points finish by a Ganassi driver (Jamie McMurray, in '04) since Sterling Marlin took third in '01.**

Waltrip




## Michael Waltrip Racing

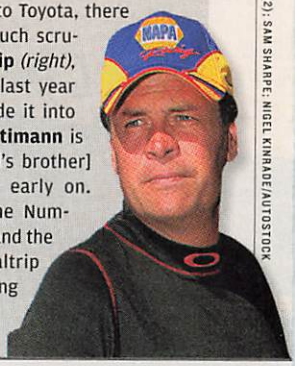
IT TOOK only one season as a full-time team owner for Michael Waltrip to ruin the good name he made for himself in 25 years as a driver. After getting caught cheating on the eve of last year's Daytona 500, he spent the rest of his nightmare campaign struggling to qualify his team's cars. Dale Jarrett made it into 24 races, but Waltrip himself earned a start only 14 times. A new partner, billionaire financier Robert Kauffman, and the continued commitment of manufacturer Toyota provide the team with the money it needs to compete. That reinforcement has to make 2008 a better season. —M.B.

| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| < MICHAEL WALTRIP | 44 | 23RD | 44TH |
| *After embarrassing new Cup entrant Toyota last season, the owner-driver has his back against the wall. A strong start to the season is essential.* | | | |
| < DAVID REUTIMANN | 37 | 2ND | 39TH |
| *He had the team's top car a year ago and will be counted on to be a contender in superspeedway races.* | | | |
| MICHAEL McDOWELL | 23 | ROOKIE | — |
| *Perhaps the most skilled new Cup driver without an open-wheel pedigree, the Arizonan was a four-time winner last year in the ARCA RE/MAX Series.* | | | |
| < DALE JARRETT | 51 | 22ND | 41ST |
| *The 1999 Cup champ moves into the TV booth for ESPN following the March 16 race at Bristol, bringing down the curtain on his quarter-century career.* | | | |

### ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON AN OPPOSING TEAM SIZES UP MWR

**11**
**CONSECUTIVE races for which Waltrip failed to qualify last year, after running 30th in the Daytona 500.**

"WITH GIBBS moving to Toyota, there won't be nearly as much scrutiny on **Michael Waltrip** *(right)*, who wasn't that bad last year when he actually made it into a race. . . . **David Reutimann** is a talent that [Michael's brother] **Darrell Waltrip** saw early on. Reutimann will be the Number 1 driver this year—and the future of Michael Waltrip Racing. The team is being built around him."




GANASSI, FROM TOP: SAM SHARPE; MATTHEW THACKER/ASP/CAL SPORT MEDIA; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK (2). WALTRIP, FROM TOP: RUSTY JARRETT/GETTY IMAGES FOR NASCAR; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK (2); SAM SHARPE; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK

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Truex

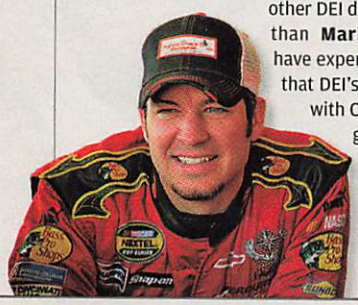
# Dale Earnhardt Inc.

WITH Dale Earnhardt Jr. gone to Hendrick, this season begins a new era for the team that his late father founded in 1996. Martin Truex Jr. becomes the lead driver one season after winning his first Cup race, but he has the talent that an organization can build around. Truex and the rest of DEI's drivers benefited from the data supplied by a dedicated test team formed in '07, plus the engine alliance with Richard Childress Racing. Ageless Mark Martin (24 races) and 23-year-old Aric Almirola (12) will split the ride in Junior's old number 8 Chevy, and Martin's leadership should accelerate the learning process for the team's youngsters. Still, DEI lacks the resources to contend each week. —L.A.

| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| < MARTIN TRUEX JR. | 27 | 3RD | 11TH |
| *One of the biggest surprises on the Cup circuit last season, he should come into his own this year. He's as fast on the intermediate tracks as almost any other driver.* | | | |
| < PAUL MENARD | 27 | 2ND | 34TH |
| *He's a fiery young talent but, with an average finish of 26.8 in 30 races last season, he will need to show more patience to move up in the standings.* | | | |
| REGAN SMITH | 24 | ROOKIE | — |
| *In seven Cup starts last year his best finish was 24th. Don't expect him to be in the top 15 in any race.* | | | |
| < MARK MARTIN | 49 | 25TH | 27TH |
| *The veteran showed he's still got what it takes when he finished in the top five in four of his first five starts last season; he ran in only 19 races after that.* | | | |

## ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON ANOTHER TEAM SIZES UP DEI

"**MARTIN TRUEX** *(below)* is the real deal. The question is how much support he'll get from the other DEI drivers, who other than **Mark Martin** don't have experience. . . . I think that DEI's engine program with Childress can only get better. . . . If Truex runs well, don't be surprised if Dale Jr. recruits him for Hendrick."



**10** ENGINES that DEI Chevys blew during races last season, the most of any team on the Nextel Cup circuit.

Busch

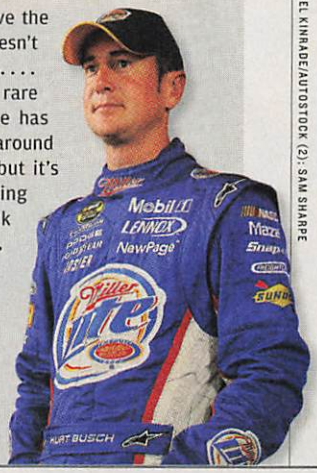
# Penske Racing

LAST YEAR Penske boasted two of the most accomplished drivers in 2004 champion Kurt Busch and Ryan Newman, but was at a disadvantage against outfits that ran three or more cars and therefore had more testing data to mine for setup information. While Busch had moments of brilliance and made the Chase, Newman, though as impressive as ever in qualifying, struggled on Sundays and closed out '07 on an 81-race winless streak. So it was no surprise that owner Roger Penske increased the size of his operation. He brought in three-time IndyCar Series champ Sam Hornish Jr., one of four open-wheel stars who will compete for rookie honors. —M.B.

| DRIVERS | Age | Cup Season | '07 Points Standing |
|---|---|---|---|
| < RYAN NEWMAN | 30 | 7TH | 13TH |
| *With former Busch Series crew chief Roy McCauley now atop his Cup box, Flyin' Ryan will try to maintain the momentum of five top 10 finishes in the last 10 races of '07.* | | | |
| KURT BUSCH | 29 | 8TH | 7TH |
| *He came on strong last year under the tutelage of crew chief Pat Tryson. With a larger team and an improved CoT program, Busch should contend for another title.* | | | |
| < SAM HORNISH JR. | 28 | ROOKIE | — |
| *Using Penske owner points, Hornish won't have to worry about qualifying for the first few races. That should ease the pressure as he comes to grips with the stock car.* | | | |

## ENEMY LINES: AN INSIDER ON AN OPPOSING TEAM SIZES UP PENSKE

"IT SEEMS like **Roger Penske** doesn't have the open checkbook he once had. The team doesn't have the resources of some of the others. . . . **Kurt Busch** *(right)* is Penske racing. He's a rare talent. . . . Penske has put good people around **Ryan Newman**, but it's just not happening for him. . . . I think **Sam Hornish Jr.** is going to have a hell of a time. He didn't show anything last year; there's no reason to think he will this year."



**9** DNFs in '07 for Newman, tying him with Earnhardt for the most of any driver in the top 35 of the points standings.

DEI: FROM TOP: MARK J. REBILAS/US PRESSWIRE; SAM SHARPE; SAM GREENWOOD/GETTY IMAGES FOR NASCAR; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK (2). PENSKE: FROM TOP: ALAN SMITH/ASP/CAL SPORT MEDIA; NIGEL KINRADE/AUTOSTOCK (2); SAM SHARPE

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